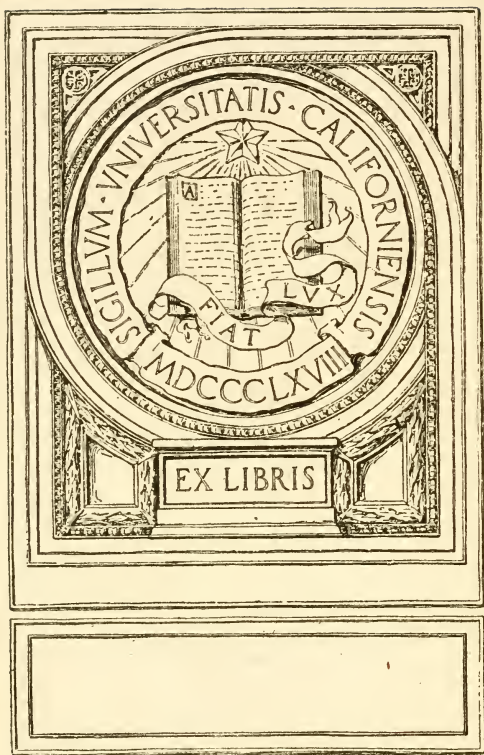


BATTERY FLASHES

By "WAGGER"









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By "WAGGER "

LONDON :
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

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BATTERY FLASHES

CHAPTER I

IN THE MAKING

Sunday, August 13th, 1914.

RÉVEILLÉ at 5.30 brought a relief from a very cold night—only one blanket between three of us in our tent of eleven men. But to-day is better, and we are all very jolly and cheerful. I am afraid I shall only have time to send hasty impressions of camp life as they strike me.

September 6th, 1914.

I feel your letters are as good as and better than a cheering crowd ; we being in mufti till we get to D., will not have any “ send off,” and probably shall not even go together to the station. At present I don't know a soul in the R.F.A., but there are amongst a very mixed lot a fair sprinkling of very decent fellows and gentlemen ; I got into it in preference because it has the record of being the best Territorial Regiment in B. for efficiency and smartness.

I hope we shall keep up the standard, as there is a lot to learn in gunnery, horse management being the same, of course, as in the Yeomanry.

We are using the 15-pounder (shell) Field Artillery gun, lighter than Royal Horse Artillery, though, of course, ours is a mounted regiment; but the Horse Artillery are not so mobile. The guns are of the type and period of the South African War, but brought up to date. I feel it very much not being able to see any of you before we move, as I fully expect we shall go to-morrow; 180 are going to-morrow and the rest later to D. As soon as I am posted to a battery I will let you know my address and the method of addressing. I have now all my kit complete, even to the vaseline and socks. We had a church parade this morning in the barrack grounds. Canon A., chaplain to the Brigade, took the service and gave a very interesting address. I would write to all in answer to letters if there were time, but this is the first day I have had between the hours of 9 a.m. and 10 p.m. to arrange business matters, etc., with H., and there is much to settle, and much that I must perforce leave unsettled.

My name will be added to the church list, I suppose, next Sunday.

All of us are to go abroad as soon as trained, we believe, as we all signed on for foreign service.

Friday, September 17th, 1914.

About 10 a.m. the end tent of each battery is like a P.O. clearing house, being stocked with parcels and letters. Some kind friends in P. (five miles away) sent me some Cornish pasties and apple turnovers yesterday, which were much appreciated in the tent. So after 6.30 yesterday I got leave till 9.30 and went in and saw them and had a look round the Hoe, and "saw the Sound." As yet we are still without uniforms and likely to be for rather more than the greater part of some time, though yesterday we had blankets and the great luxury of a straw palliasse issued, and I had my first good night. We expect to go to either South Africa or Egypt in a few weeks, but shall probably (and I hope) get three days' leave for seeing friends before we go.

Now I will try and give you some idea of our life and duties. First, our R.F.A. consists of three batteries of four guns each (not six gun batteries) and ammunition column.

No. 1 Battery 4 guns, 131 horses and 145 men.

No. 2 Battery 4 guns, 131 horses and 145 men.

No. 3 Battery 4 guns, 131 horses and 145 men.

Ammunition column, thirty-six ammunition

wagons with four-horse teams and other forage, supply and Red Cross wagon and second line transport wagons and about 200 men. These have been expanded now in total to about 800 or 900 men and officers and 700 or so horses. Though all men have to ride, the drivers, signallers, observers, non-com. officers and officers ride on horseback on the march, the gunners ride on the gun limbers, battery wagons and ammunition wagons. I am now training for signaller as well as gunner, so shall have a horse to myself and more responsible position with chance of getting first stripe (bombardier). Our guns are heavy 18-pounders and one howitzer drawn by six horses each, the three rear horses ridden by drivers (the Royal Horse Artillery are light guns, 13-pounders, and move everywhere *in* action at the gallop). Our range is 6,000 yards extreme and 5,400 effective, shrapnel being used, except against cavalry who are in close range, 400 yards, when case shot is blazed at them as hard as possible (case shot is tin filled with bullets, etc., which spread quickly, the shell bursting at once), whereas shrapnel is timed either to burst when it touches a given object (the ground) or after so many seconds, so as to burst thirty feet in the air over the heads of advancing enemy. Our business is to smash up opposing batteries of guns and also to fire over the heads of our own

advancing infantry so as to cover their approach up to within the last few hundreds yards, when they have to fix bayonets and rush the position, R.F.A. following up and shelling the retreating enemy. We carry no arms, and once cavalry get up to us the only thing to be done is to get amongst the wheels, and "even there they get you," as Sergeant-Major cheerily says.

Each battery, however, has thirty-six rifles for the purpose of mounting its own guards and pickets, etc., and sometimes under certain conditions they are allowed more and take them into action.

The staff of a battery is :

One battery commander, major or captain.

Three or four lieutenants.

Two sergeant-majors.

One quartermaster-sergeant.

Four sergeants (in command of each gun).

Nine men to each gun.

Signallers.

Observers.

Trumpeters.

Drivers.

Spare men and spare sergeants.

Ammunition column men.

The gun-laying is very complicated, what with telescopes, reflectors, angles of sight and spirit

levels, all to be adjusted if the object is in view ; if the object is hidden by mist or hills, indirect laying has to be done by aiming so many degrees right, left, forward or behind of some given object within view. There you are, and now you all know almost as much of gunnery as I do.

The next thing is our day :

5 or sometimes 5.30. Réveillé.

6 a.m. Parade and roll-call by sub-sections (of which there are four to each battery for stables). (Stables means watering, feeding, grooming if wet, hand-slapping and exercising horses.)

7—7.30. Laying down (putting hay for horses) and cleaning lines.

7.30—8.15. Breakfast, consisting of one-sixth of loaf of bread and one and a half ounces of jam. Nothing else. (We get one pound or half of loaf of bread per day, to be divided into the only three meals we get, breakfast, dinner, and late tea.)

8.15. Parade for gun drill or boot and saddle for going on the moors with the guns, or foot drill, rifle drill, etc.

11.30. Stables as before and signalling.

1—2. Dinner. Consisting of another one-sixth of bread and a tin of broth with meat in.

- 2—2.15. Ceremonial parade, followed by gun drill and other drills till 3.30, when stables again and harness cleaning, gun-carriage cleaning, etc.
- 5.15. Dismiss, and tea, consisting of the last one-sixth of bread and two ounces of jam.

No supper is provided. First post 9.30, last post 10, lights out 10.15. We get half a pint of tea for "brekker" and half a pint for tea. Verily, simple fare, known as the rations.

Of course day and night guards and pickets have to be set, and there are various fatigue duties, though we find the ordinary round quite fatiguing enough. This incessant rain has made it very cold and miserable and doubled the work, as the horse lines get inches deep in mud, several horses being on the sick list with cracked heels and kicks from other horses. We ourselves have been very lucky: only about ten cases of men kicked and only three of those badly, one in the stomach, and it is feared he will not live; he is in Plymouth hospital, one of the original Territorials, not, of course, a foreign service one; he was only a lad of 17, poor little chap. The other home service ones, about 300, whom we call non-conformists, are to return to B. shortly, to guard the old and venerable town from danger. To-night I am off to Plymouth

to dine with Mr. D., to my shame in my filthy clothes, and am now, 6.30, finishing this in Plymouth G.P.O. He very kindly called on me this afternoon, and other kind friends in Plymouth have been awfully good in sending Cornish pasties, etc. I am to be, I think, a battery staff signaller, as I have got on with that all right, and shall consequently be an outrider with a horse to myself, but time will show. We are a very jolly lot and chaff one another about the various little "hindrances we meet" (as the hymn says); it is chilly work, for instance, stripping to the waist at 5 a.m. in pouring rain and washing at the ablution benches under a trickle of water from the taps; there is no bathing near.

September 28th, 1914.

I much enjoyed a bath at Plymouth last week. The pears were perfect, and I should think the peaches will be ripe in about two days. The plums and apples I have "whacked" round with the others, three of us being pretty well supplied with food parcels, while the others get nothing, so that "one" feels "one" can't gloat over delicacies when "two" (and for that matter three and four and several others) are splashing away in their tins of greasy broth, trying to separate the case-hardened tissues we term meat

from the gristle and fat, of which latter Army Service Corps bullocks seem to be chiefly composed. H. also has sent me a weekly parcel, including malt wheat bread, and sardines, so that my meals lately have appeared to the others as a sort of glorified table d'hôte. If many recruits are being so generously treated no wonder Kitchener's Army is increasing in size.

For the first time in my life I have blessed the fact of my having "a good grip of the ground"—or big feet; if it were not for the colossal size of my boots I don't know what I should do for a store cupboard. My two military pairs are the latter, and while this fine weather lasts I am wearing out an old pair of my own.

No. 1 boot, black, left foot is stored with chocolate and a candle and also holds my belt by night.

No. 2, its right fellow, is a "fellow of the baser sort," and is given up to three tins of black dubbin and two brushes for same.

No. 3 boot, brown, has a box of matches, devotional books and a manual of Field Artillery training.

No. 4, its fellow, has H.'s invaluable electric flash-lamp, a brown rag and brown dubbin, and room for any fruit in course of consumption.

My whole toilet outfit, including a glass the size of a 5s. piece, is contained in a Rowntree's clear gums tin; bless Rowntree's clear gums, may they never grow dim or have neuralgia.

We always have to sleep in our clothes. It saves time going to bed and getting up, and H. will tell you I am an awful dawdle, and with twelve in a tent there would not be much room in which to flourish one's garments, and the supply of ottomans (or is it ottomania?) whereon to lay them is limited. My bed drill on cold nights is as follows: On the order "one," take the woollen night-cap smartly with both hands and place on the head, at "two" cut away the hands smartly to the sides and prepare for leg drill. Leg drill, on the word "one," lower the left and right hand to the boots, drawing them off sharply on the order "two," "three" come back to the "recline." Give a slight "cant" to the bedsocks, catching them lightly in the right hand, and drawing them on with a smart forward movement. Cut away both hands smartly to the sides and give forty winks in quick time, waking up at *réveillé* and reversing the movements in double quick time. There you are, that is how a "Tommy" goes to bed. He even writes "by numbers," and I see I have numbered four pages, so will close up now.

Tent, October.

We all feel rather sore that K.'s army is being better equipped than our own. We have no uniform yet, and we were told we should be outfitted directly on arrival and therefore not to take anything but old things ; consequently we have no change of clothes and are still in thin summer flannels, and frequently get wet through and have to let them dry on our bodies. This is not grouching but just airing facts of very poor management. Either our officers are hopelessly incompetent as regards organization, or else the County Association ; it lies between them. Thanks awfully for your offer of a rug. I should be most grateful for one, specially if small enough to fit in top of kit bag. I am writing a letter round to-day of our duties, etc., which I hope will interest you when it arrives. Another thing is that we have only had 10s. pay advanced out of nearly 35s. due ; they don't pay regularly at all, and we are not to get *any* this Friday, but to get another advance next Friday.

I should be glad to feel the War Office authorities and A.S.C. big pots, also the Government M.P.'s and officials, were receiving only one-quarter of what was due to them and an indefinite promise of a little more to be advanced in a few days. The R.F.A.'s, other than the newly-arrived recruits, have almost been in a state of

mutiny, as we have a beast of a Colonel, and they have been at meal-times shouting in chorus, to tune of "Holy, holy, holy," the song I detail over:

"Starving, starving, starving, always b——
well starving,

From réveillé to lights out we're always
b—— starving.

Starving, starving, starving, always b——
well starving.

We shall be glad when our time's up, we'll
starve no b—— more."

These fellows, I may say, are those who have *not* volunteered for foreign service. The Colonel, in addressing them, before we came, said that "they might think of their wives and children; but d—— your wives and d—— your children, if you put them before your country, you deserve to be called 'cowards.'" This upset them, and a lot refused to volunteer who might have done. Bugle.

November, 1914.

We are now very busy mastering the Morse system on the field telephone "buzzer," as semaphore and Morse by flags are only to be used when the telephone wires get put out of action—owing to the exposed position you have to take for flag-wagging.

Last night I was on picket on the horse lines again. It comes round oftener now. Rain, high wind and cold each in superlative degree made it the most miserable night we have yet spent, and without wishing the horses any serious harm we wished they would all drop down dead to save further trouble. Twice the ground ropes burst on which thirty horses were strung; luckily the rain was beating down so hard they were too miserable to stampede, but it was an hour's job in the pitchy blackness untying the wet knots and releasing the horses from the rope, tying them up again to guns and wagons, splicing the rope and once more re-tethering with our hands as numb as stones; truly we have our little excitements. One or two tried to bite and kick, but on picket you don't feel like a merciful man who is merciful to his beast, and they got badly tickled up for their trouble. Two funny things happened, or rather three. Firstly, the inspecting officer lost his way, after I challenged him and turned out the picket from their tent for inspection, and walked into the horses, whereout or whence from I had to lead him round to the poor sleepy beggars standing in the rain waiting to be inspected. Those, of course, already on duty—like myself—remain walking up and down the horse lines. The second funny thing was that I challenged one of the guards, having wandered a few yards

out of *my* way from the horses into the gun park, where there is a guard on duty; and thirdly, a little later the guard reversed my mistake and challenged me in the horse lines. There is no "Pass, friend, all's well," given now after dark; it is "Advance, friend, and be recognized." The whole night long a searchlight was stabbing the sky from C., which made one feel that the nation is really always awake and on guard day and night, and that nothing can come by sea air, or land, unchallenged. Woe betide an enemy on a wet night, when all guards are very cross!!! So all at such vulnerable points as T. and E. may rest in bed secure in the thought that any invasion cannot come before we are aware of it. We are in trouble again in the signalling department, orders having come through that we are to learn lamp, helio and wireless, as well as the semaphore and field telephone buzzer, and for the former we shall have night parades. Help!! Once in the fighting line, however, signallers will get 3d. a day extra.

We are still floundering around amongst contradictory orders and rumours, amongst which runs the bedrock official order to move to France December 6th. The others are as follows: 600 drill khaki suits ordered for service in Egypt and helmets. A like number of cardigans actually on order for cold weather in France. New guns

coming to strengthen the R.F.A. in India. Move ordered to the new trenches in England to repel the invader. And so it goes on. Truly, all men are liars—and expert official ones—in war time. Only two salient facts remain certain and incontrovertible :

- (1) There is a war on somewhere, but no one knows exactly where.
- (2) A force estimated at between 20,000 and 15,000 Russians in khaki passed through England on a Sunday night in August on the way to the left wing of that war if there is a left wing.

A third unimportant fact may be added which goes to prove the first : *i.e.*, I've joined some khaki affair and therefore there must be a war, or I shouldn't find myself in such an uncomfortably wet position.

November 8th, 1914.

We have been doing double duty in the day and more frequent guards, etc., during the night, as half our men are away at — (I mustn't say where) digging gun emplacements and trenches in case of invasion, which (the invasion) is very improbable, and which (the trenches) in that case we should occupy until the invaders

were wiped out, before going abroad. The line of trenches when these are completed a few miles away, will stretch from a point covering London to beyond Lincoln, and I fancy Yorkshire has a similar line altogether some 300 miles long—"some trench," as the Americans would say. Our Divisional Brigade, unless Germany has the cheek to invade us, begins to move on November 30th, and the last lot will have left by December 8th for — on the — in the S. of — not many miles from — where we hope, together with the —ths —s and the —nd and —rd —s, covered by the — Lancers, to advance on — and finally arrive at —, to which please address all letters (*vide* Press) !

I forgot to say that General —, late of the —th —s, will command, and now you know as much officially as we do ourselves, except that only 600 of us are to go ; the rest remain as a reserve battery in — I mean England, to be brigaded with the War^k. Artillery ! I am glad to say I am pretty sure of being one of the 600, and have often wanted to visit France. I am glad I waited to go via "Government" instead of "Cook's," as the former is so much cheaper, though perhaps the accommodation and hotels are not quite so good. I was on guard the other night on the wettest night it has ever been my lot to see. Not only did it rain "'eavens 'ard,"

it rained “’eavens’ ’ardest” from the time we presented arms to the old guard at 6 p.m. till 4 a.m. next morning. The changing guard is a quaint ceremony. The two “guards,” now nine men and a bombardier in charge, stand facing one another at two yards’ interval, and the bombardiers in charge give the following orders in turn :

“ Old guard, slope—arms.”

“ New guard, slope—arms.”

“ Old guard, present—arms.”

“ New guard, present—arms.”

“ Old guard, slope—arms.”

“ New guard, slope—arms.”

“ Old guard, dis—miss.”

“ New guard, order—arms—to your duties.”

Poor beggars, the new guard ! On this particular night one of our men was shot dead while guarding the Marconi wireless station. He and the spy shot at one another together ; but, worse luck, the German, if it was one, got his in first. We are now mounting guard with magazine half full at night, viz. five cartridges, and will only give one challenge.

8.30. Just at a hotel in C., after going to the newly called cathedral. The windows all shrouded with huge blue curtains and the whole town in darkness. They are very careful here ; all trains

in and out of London have the blinds down on the E. coast side. To-day a biplane sailed over us—one of our own, of course.

November 28th, 1914.

We are using the new short rifle for our guards, etc. We have just done thirty-six hours' continuous duty, with only four hours' sleep, and most of it in the rain, getting literally wet to the skin; but the open air and work seems to keep you from catching cold, and it is jolly fun. We had a field day with aeroplanes, and took up a position previously fortified defending London on the Billericay road; and at 6 p.m. got home and went on straight to digging winding trenches and gun emplacements here in the dark, as all such work has now to be done in the dark by order. It is great fun getting the measurements and straight edges, which have to be exact. We got four hours' sleep, and then at 6 a.m. again started the next day's work, all pretty "woolly" and tired; but we are enjoying the life, and only fear we sha'n't be wanted abroad now till after Christmas, as they fear a raid on England, and we are holding back for that.

December 8th, 1914.

We are here, worse luck, as long as Christmas, we expect, unless anything happens on the coast,

as both Allies and enemy seem to be going to "stand fast" for the winter; but we have been prepared to move off at two hours' notice for three weeks or more now. Nothing much exciting happens beyond our joint work with aircraft, who assist us in ranging, etc.; also we have an anti-aircraft gun, but we are now forbidden to say anything definite of our doings, "or the disposition, condition or movements of His Majesty's Forces," a notice which had to be read out daily for a week on parade.

So if you get letters from any other place don't be surprised. Anyone who writes can always address to the last known address, as our letters always follow us.

CHAPTER II

A NIGHT ON GUARD

RAIN, rain, and wind, and yet more rain. Water lying in large sheets all over the horse lines two inches deep, alternated with mud banks, where the feet slip in over the ankles. Rain running down the rifle, and trickling along the forearm ; rain trickling from your cap down your neck and spine ; rain sopping through your overcoat, tunic, and shirt, till your body is a wet pack ; rain swishing off the trees in broad sheets, and then—the irony of it—a sharp voice breaks in through the everlasting swish and slush of water—“Guard at the water trough, is all well?”

You advance swampily into the dark impenetrable wall of night, and answer, perhaps with an inward sardonic laugh, “All’s well.” Silence again, broken only by the eternal swishing sound. Would that a German would only come and try to poison the water ! It would be a welcome relief to challenge and shoot at something, and hear the tinkle of glass as his spectacles caved in !

7 a.m. dawns, or rather doesn't dawn; it is dark still, but “fall in” and “stables” have sounded. It is a queer sight, men bending over the horse lines and undoing ropes two inches under water, with knots tightened by rain, and the tugging horses, and yet queerer still—although there is much said jocularly of the weather, such as “blowing up for rain,” or “shouldn't wonder if we don't get some rain, it looks cloudy,” after twenty-four-hours-at-once solid and liquid rain—there is more cheerfulness and jollity among the men than when it is fine and all are grouching at being still in England. Out of the darkness you can hear many whistling, and one cheerful idiot breaks into “Good-bye summer, good-bye, good-bye” in falsetto, thereby causing his horse to buck with astonishment. The only miserable beings are the horses. There they stand pegged to earth, heads down in abject despondency, only waking to life and softly whinnying when they hear the order, “Stand to your nose-bags.” The long drawn out “F-e-e-e-d” which follows starts them dancing up and down till you are splashed from head to foot with fluid mud; and still it rains. One man alone is heartily anathematized by all, viz., the “Quarter-bloke,” as he is off-handedly termed (his full title being Quartermaster-Sergeant-Major). He is the object of everyone's

abuse, because none have a change of uniform, boots, or puttees to put on when wet, though all are perfectly aware that the "Quarter-bloke" can't issue them if the A.S.C. are unable to obtain them for him.

Still, you must have a scapegoat in the Army for every inconvenience, and the "Quarter-bloke's" back is broad and will bear much. But this is a digression (*vide* lady novelists), and the real point of what I was writing is that it is still raining, and dawn has at last broken—presumably dawn was full of water before it broke. I know now what one David, the late illustrious Psalmist, meant by the "sound of the water pipes." He must have "done a guard" when it was raining "'eavens' 'ard."

7 a.m. Up to the time of going to press it is raining, though not quite "'eavens' 'ard," and one or two thin and weak sunbeams are struggling through the over-developed (and very much "over-exposed") sky, making the trees form a lovely picture in black and silver, each twig and branch being black below with a line of silver light on its upper side. But this is drivelling, and I shall shortly become as empty and uninteresting a writer as a war correspondent, whose accounts seem in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the result of treating an imaginative liar at the base camp to a beer or two, and in the

one remaining case the final account (representing a vast amount of arithmetic in “addition” and “multiplication”), after passing through the “hearsay” of scores of other men.

CHAPTER III

LONDON AND SALISBURY PLAIN

January 1st, 1915.

LAST Saturday I gave myself an afternoon and evening holiday with some congenial souls—in London. And what a delight it was to get into life once more, to go to a theatre and sit in a decent seat amongst ladies and gentlemen in evening dress and imagine I had mine on too ! I wondered what horror would have been depicted on their faces had they seen us a few hours before, or better still a few hours after on “The Plain,” legs, boots, and overcoat indistinguishable in mud, splashes of mud on faces, hands and hats, and generally very dishevelled-looking and dirty. I wonder if any of them we saw that night happened by chance to be motoring on Salisbury Plain three days afterwards and saw a lot of revoltingly dirty Tommies ; if so I should have loved to call out, “Hi, I sat next to you in the orchestra stalls at the Aldwych on Saturday night.” *Tableau vivant* in expressions.

One seems to live two lives : one that of a flounderer in mud and rain with the ever-present

aroma of horse "temporarily-attached"; the other, occasional squirmings out of the mud like a worm on to the green grass of life again, when self-respect asserts itself with a feeling of I'm-as-good-as-you-and-be-blowed-to-you sort of feeling when you see a clean collar and white spats.

Step into the train again at —, and gradually the old feeling comes on until on tramping to — it is quite a pleasure to feel a soldier again. And after all you cannot get far away from the soldier in London. In the daytime your hand aches with saluting officers, and at night khaki is sprinkled pretty freely over the theatres and foodmongers' and drinkwrights' establishments, to remind you of the steel and khaki ring which encloses London, with its radius of thirty miles and circumference of—well, work it out yourselves (3.14 by 30^2)! It looks strange to see peaceful — Park with a huge gun emplacement thirty feet high in the middle of it, and with a grey anti-aircraft gun craning its neck up at the skies therefrom, and at night time from the same place, and from the top of the — gates and other points, moving shafts of light keep stabbing the darkness in all directions, watching over the seven millions who grope in semi-obscurity beneath, cursing—with the quick forgetfulness and wholly self-centred priggishness of the British man-in-the-street—the War Office that restricts

the lighting and illumination of shop windows. I'd love to take such a man for a midnight tramp on Salisbury Plain, where you positively push against the darkness, and certainly stub your toes on a hillock or jar your knees in a hole sixty times to the hour. Now about Salisbury Plain itself; but you must understand that anything I say of its mud is not exaggerated at all—it is impossible to put into words any believable description of it. We detrained at —, — miles from Stonehenge, and had a five mile march to —, along roads which were flowing, eddying streams of mud of a pea soup consistency for fully a mile, deeper than the tops of our boots, through which endless mud-clogged transports slashed their way slowly, but fast enough to reduce us to living replicas of the road itself; then followed a dip in the road just before Stonehenge where flood water was pouring across the road boot high, and with force enough to make you think it was a ford across a swift stream; then Stonehenge, which we passed within a few yards of; so disappointing somehow in size, and yet so mysterious, as being put there by “*us*” of hundreds of years ago, the scene of horrible cruelties and sacerdotal murderings, and still overlooking a wild scene where generations of men have learned and still do learn the most skilful of fiendish ways of killing other men.

Well, here we are coming to add to our skill at the same old trade. “The Plain” is a weird sight: no plain at all, but folds and waves of ground for miles, with an occasional square of firs with about the comparative frequency of the cherries in cherry cake; everywhere are towns of hutments, tents and other buildings on every point of the horizon. Heaven and the War Office only know what countless hosts of soldiers are here. We continually met marching parties and saw others skirmishing and generally “messaging about.” A party of about 200 were drawn up in Stonehenge enclosure, and a sporting officer was evidently explaining it to them. I wonder if they believed him. I have found the average Tommy’s mind cannot go back many years in imagination, and antiquities to him are so much “swank” on the part of the kindly officer who tries to interest them. Well, we finally had to take to the “grass,” long since trodden, ground, and churned into deep toffee-like mud (incidentally, men returned from the trenches assert that the Plain is worse than the trenches in France for mud, and though I take that *cum grano salis* I cannot imagine worse), and finally got to our hutments, wooden buildings about fifty feet long and twenty wide, with thick cardboard for ceiling and wall-paper, and three boards stretched across two low trestles four inches high

for each man's bed. Outside is a sea of black toffee, piles of timber, rusting galvanized iron, hundreds of stoves, pipes, and fittings rotting and rusting, breaking and cracking in a vast filthy welter, hordes of workmen putting up hutments so fast that one turns round to blow one's nose and on facing front again sees another building up ! As yet only two taps laid on, and they spring up out of the ground like stuffed snakes erect, covered with frost-proof ; but we may only drink thereat, so no one had a wash for two days until we returned to —. The next thing was bed, two blankets a piece and the three boards, but we slept the sleep of the just (pegged out). Forty men in a room and looking for all the world, when I woke up in the night owing to the collapse of my four-inch trestle, like a horrible nightmare in some catacomb, were it not for the fact that whereas *all* slept visibly, *most* slept also audibly. The next day came the firing tests, prefaced by a five mile walk across the sticky waste and once fording a stream knee high, flowing not in the bed of a stream, but down a lane ! Understand, we were only the gunners and the signallers, and the guns we used belonged to the — R.F.A., whose drivers drove them into action for us at the various places.

The firing was on the whole good, and the Colonel was pleased. The horses were fairly

used to it; we had them 500 yards off under cover, and at every discharge they only bobbed their heads up and down. The first discharge until the trail of the gun forces itself into the ground rattles and rends every bone in your body and jumps you up a few inches on the iron seat, after which you get used to it, and so long as the mouth is kept open at each discharge no harm results; if not, the pressure may burst the ear drums. First target about 3,300 yards, "Guns in action." The gunners cannot see them (imitation guns of course), as our guns are just below the brow of a hill, so the firing has to be controlled from the observation station, and the gun has to be sighted by a circular dial sight upon some object the gunners and observers can see; then the angle of sight is given, the muzzle swung round the few necessary degrees, and the dial sight readjusted the same number of degrees, until over it you can see the object or auxiliary aiming point that you first chose. Although it may be right, left, or even behind you, so long as you are sighted on to it, your muzzle will point at the hidden target that the observers require you to hit. The breech is closed by No. 2 with a clang, No. 3 pulls the firing lever and—bang—followed by a long shrieking swish, getting fainter and fainter till—phut! the shell explodes and a puff of white smoke right on the "guns in

action" shows the range and the line are found ; then you, or rather Nos. 4, 5 and 6, set fuses, so that instead of bursting on percussion the shrapnel will burst by time, about thirty feet above the target. This goes on for five hours at, respectively, guns in action, infantry in trench, infantry advancing, and cavalry advancing, all duly represented correctly at different ranges, and finally at a target behind a hill crest and therefore invisible to gunners or observers alike. Bang—a sheet of flame from the muzzle, the old swishing sound, a faint crash, and a tree on the hill crest, two feet in diameter, disappears 4,500 yards away, or two and a half miles, and doubtless the target behind is duly peppered with shrapnel and bits of tree ; it is the quickest tree felling I have ever seen, and a very good way of reducing the raw material to firewood ; the funny thing is that the burst is visible—naturally—long before the scream of the shell's passage is finished and the crash of its burst heard. On our return several aeroplanes were airing over the Plain, but a really funny sight was, not an aeroplane but a hare (o' plain) followed at an immense distance by a short-legged mongrel dog, who had not even the proverbial "dog's chance" of catching up the hare ; the mongrel was heartily ashamed of himself and looked it every small inch of him, but he followed us gamely all the

way to the station for some reason only known to himself, and on arrival was a mere small mud pudding instead of a white, shaggy-haired dog.

Our train both ways wandered round the north of London on a loop line evidently used chiefly for troop trains for about twenty miles from Woking, through Willesden, Hampstead Heath, Staines, Richmond, Ilford and Stratford, E. (these places are not in order, and therefore show no direction of route !!!) Women crowded the windows all the way and waved and called blessings on our amateur and territorial heads; it is awfully sporting of them, and we appreciated it tremendously and it bucked us up a lot. We cheered and cheered at them back the whole way, and at the various "guards" on important stations who "turned out" in style and cheered us. The rate of travel through London being only about eight to ten miles an hour, we enjoyed that part of the six-hour journey immensely. It was very funny, few men at that time of day were apparently in their houses, but all women and children seemed to rush to the windows directly they heard the train and our yells. Ladies in Richmond and Twickenham from drawing-room windows, servant girls from the kitchens, less prosperous ladies of Staines, Hampstead, Acton, etc., and finally crowded tenements, where we crossed over the M.R. and G.N.R. a few hundred

yards from St. Pancras and King's Cross stations, and the hovels round Stratford, they all seemed awfully sporting. I remember spotting one dear old lady just like Mother in a drawing-room window just beyond Kew Gardens station; she waved like a good 'un, and we gave her an extra loud yell from our carriage. The noise must have been tremendous, as both sides of the train had the same thing going on from one end of the train to another, and if we saw a woman in a street below us we generally made her wave by cheering her all to herself. Goodness knows where we shall go now, as the "situation is developing" in —, and we may have to go to —. Anyhow "here we are, here we are, here we are again," and none of us will believe we are going anywhere else until we are there, and then I don't think it would surprise us to step out of the train and find the name of the station blacked over. Like the artillery, whose badge bears the legend "Ubique," the censor is also ubiquitous. One thing we all know: that is, we shall be glad when we get to the front, for although we are not sick of the R.F.A., we are heartily sick of this *Rotten Fiddling About*.

CHAPTER IV

YOUR KING AND COUNTRY NEED YOU

“Two o’clock ! come on, next relief, gerrup, you lazy blighter”—thus the Corporal of the guard addressed a recumbent figure, one of four that lay huddled, but fully dressed with overcoat, bandolier and spurs on ; three rustled themselves sleepily into more comfortable positions in the straw, while the fourth, with a wide-awakeness that comes only with practice, snatched up his rifle and cap and prepared to be escorted to his post by the Corporal, who would return with the relieved sentry.

“Gosh ! what a filthy night,” said the gunner, as they slushed their way along in the snow-covered mud. Snow was falling fast and steadily in big crown-piece flakes, so thickly that the two groping blindly along almost bumped into the sentry.

“Anything to report ? ” “Nothing, Corporal.” “Right then, sentries pass, about turn, quick march !” and off went the Corporal and the old sentry to the primitive but blessed shelter of the guard hut, leaving the new one “packing”

his upturned collar with his handkerchief, to prevent the snow from melting down his neck. "Rotten game this," he had been saying only a few hours before to a fellow-guard, "Why don't they send us abroad if we *are* going, and not keep us messing about a wretched little English hamlet? We're doing no good here." Of course he knew he was wrong, and that he was only grumbling good-humouredly, for someone has got to guard and keep the Old country, but he did not know that, so far from doing no good, he was shortly to do the best thing any man can do for his Country, whether in an English hamlet or a Belgian mud-hole.

Snow was still falling, till the sentries' own footsteps of a minute before were obliterated. Three o'clock had just sounded thickly from the little church, followed by a quite audible Ting-ting-ting from some clock in a cottage near by, when the sentry thought he saw something move along the dark line of hedge in front of him; but then on night duty you so often do see things move when staring fixedly at them—even a two-ton gun will change its shape, or a bush turn into the similitude of a man that you could swear is moving. The only way to tell is to turn your eyes elsewhere for a moment, and then suddenly flick them back on the object. Yes, something did move stealthily across a grey break in the

hedge. "Halt ! who goes there ?" a ringing but stern challenge. No answer but the soft dap-dap-dap of the flakes on the sentry's face. "Halt ! or——" but this time the answer came too soon.

"Hear that ?" The five men in the guard hut were up in a second, rushing on capless through the stinging snow, loading their rifles as they ran. "My God ! old ——'s shot." It was the Corporal's voice—"Spread out quick, find him—shoot if he doesn't give in." And he bent over something that the snow was trying to hide, but it couldn't hide the gradually increasing patch underneath the sentry's head, that looked black against the surrounding pure white. The Corporal did what he could, which was not much, and the clearness of the stricken man's murmur almost startled him :

"Mother—lift me—up"—and the Corporal lifted the tired body up into the Everlasting Arms. His Superior Officer had relieved the weary sentry before his time was up.

* * * * *

So you see another Englishman's place must be filled now, and who is going to do it ? Wake up, Englishmen ; stay up five minutes later to-night and think it out alone, whether you are going to let your King and Country and dead

countrymen call to you in vain. This little story is an isolated case in England, you say. Yes, so it is; but what of France and Belgium? During the time you have been reading this short tale another Britisher has fallen with a crash in the mud and filth; who is to take *his* place? How many more will be killed or maimed that you may live in safety and comfort, while you are sleeping to-night; who is going to take *their* places?

Are you going to be content to sit in your arm-chair and criticize others who are fighting under difficulties your imagination cannot grasp, nor the pen describe? Are you going to argue with others in the train, or show your friends in the restaurants with crumbs, spoons and forks what you would have done here on the frontier, or where this regiment or that battleship should have been? Are you afraid to face a fire hotter than that in your club reading-room? No fear! You are British, so come along and join the Army because

YOUR KING AND COUNTRY NEED YOU.

CHAPTER V

FINISHING TOUCHES

March 10th, 1915.

THE present-day soldier might well be named the "Chocolate Soldier," after a comedy of that name and his propensity for melting down and stowing away pounds of it. Well, here we are still, due (a week ago—now public news) to go to the Dardanelles, March 27th. Counter-ordered to prepare to go to Crete next Sunday, now counter-ordered again in favour, I fancy, of the Dardanelles any time before the middle of April, and so the world wags on. But we certainly are ready and expecting a move somewhere any time within the next month. I fancy the reason is that the Home Defence Army and that part of K.'s Army who will remain in this country are not yet efficient, and there is still a possibility of a raid. Whereas Mr. Asquith, advised by K. of K., says that the Territorial Army can now face any troops in the world, it has bucked everyone up to hear we are officially considered so.

The last three days we have been marching on foot to B. ranges for musketry target practice,

at which nearly all have done very well. We had 200, 300, and 500 yards, the target being a brown life-sized head and shoulders against a green ground, and last night at 6.45 we had only been back two hours from our twelve mile tramp and long day at the ranges when we were turned out for a night attack, and only got back at 1.30 a.m. It was a pitch black night, which rendered our movements rather exciting, as this country is much like the Fens, only with plenty of wood and six foot ditches on either side of the road. I am now one of the signallers on the 2nd battery staff, and rode out as such last night, being reconnaissance officer's signaller (generally known as R.O. signaller). The R.O. chooses the position of the guns and then, when the telephone wires have been laid between the wagon line and himself, orders the guns up into position ; last night the guns and wagons were allowed to go home again from the wagon line, and the "attack" carried on in skeleton for instruction of officers, *i.e.*, the No.'s 1 of each gun (the sergeants) acted as a gun each and the battery staff and signallers and range-takers just went on with their usual duties with sergeants, lying down on the ploughed fields at intervals of twenty yards, instead of guns. We had great difficulty in locating the position of and joining telephone wires with the 1st and 3rd batteries, each half a mile or more to

right and left of us in plough land, separated by deep water-ditches and very thick withy hedges ; the 3rd battery were a "wash out," and we couldn't get in touch with them at all, though we could see flashing of flash-lamps occasionally a mile to the right and heard distant shouts. I managed to flash in Morse code (with H's lamp) that I was on the flank of G.B. (the 2nd battery) and got the answer G.A., which showed I was in in touch with 1st battery ; but as only three-quarters of a mile of wire had been brought, and it had to be trailed over hedge and ditch round about, to escape roads (and the risk of being cut in two by horses or men passing along), we could only get within a few hundred yards of one another, and a megaphone had to do the rest of the game. Once communication was established I lay down myself, and jolly glad to do it, and passed the orders to and fro. You would hardly believe how lovely and soft (albeit wet) freshly ploughed land is when you have spent a day on foot and half the night in the saddle, in addition to which, when saddling up in the dark, I got a kick which has made me rather stiff in the right leg. Two of our guns (sergeants) were so weary that they dozed on the ground. Of our direction I haven't the remotest idea, except that we passed through Little Waltham, after which we never touched a high road. Luckily no shoes

were cast or horses went lame; to cast a shoe here means five days C.B., abroad in France six months' imprisonment, as you are supposed to examine all four shoes to see if they are loose before you go out. There is rarely a march out which doesn't see some men under open arrest. If an infantry man falls out for any reason he is put under open arrest and has to explain next day to the Colonel if he had sore feet and why. The same with us. Over-riding horses, horses coming in lame, or without a shoe, gunners riding on the limbers uphill, not hearing an order, almost anything gets you put under arrest, officers and men alike. We fully expect to hear the officers of 3rd battery are under open arrest for not establishing communication with us last night. There has been a row about it; had I not found the 1st battery, I should have been under arrest by the reconnaissance officer, and he in turn by the Brigade Commander. I had a nasty half-hour finding them.

Now I must go. I fear many of my letters are rather technical, but what else have we to talk of but our work, and from my own experience of the South African War, half the terms and situations used and explained in the papers are unintelligible to the ordinary public. Tomorrow we hear we are off in the afternoon all night and back next morning. Terrible war this,

especially when one is built for comfort—not speed !

March 15th, 1915.

As far as we know we leave here next week for some rest camp—Winchester, I fancy—for a week, during which it is thought we shall get forty-eight hours' leave to say good-bye, and then off by night. It is also thought now that we are to have a scrap with the Geremo-Turkish or Turko-German army in Turkey, at which we are rather disappointed, as we would much rather go against the Germans and Austrians in France, where the North Midland Brigade have been fortunate enough to be in action five days after landing, and many are already back wounded, after only having left England a fortnight, though I believe they have been badly cut up, from all accounts ; but the official casualty lists are not out yet. Our division is already on the move, and any night alarm within the next week or so may be our last. No more letters will be delivered to billets, so they must be addressed as above to the regiment, and we get them from the battery office. You doubtless remember my remarks a few weeks ago before we stabled our horses, on the horse lines. The enclosed photo shows you the state we left them in of mud and water six inches deep. L.'s gun

boots are a great boon, and I use them every other day. We have just had new steel shields put on our guns six inches higher than the old ones, and are going to use the new high power shells, our 15-pounders being the same bore (three inches) pretty well as the French 75 mm. bore, of which we hear so much, and of which latter we are building 1,500 in this country for the French. We had a sort of farewell service at B—— yesterday morning, 9.30 a.m., the first church parade for about two and a half months. I was on guard, but being off at 6 p.m. was able to go to C. Cathedral, which is always full of off-duty men every Sunday night. The cleric didn't break in to his course of sermons on the Prodigal Son which he has been giving to say a word of advice or encouragement to the men, and not a word was said of their going, or any special hymn or prayer, although it is public news, and we had the dismalest Lenten hymns you can imagine. Many of the men were frightfully disgusted at what may be their last service, possibly for ever. Certainly I was. The C. people, for all the 80,000 men round them, don't and won't realize we are at war for our very existence as a nation and an empire, and, bless 'em, they go on in the same old way. The district visitors must meet and their sick must be visited, but not a word will the cathedral authorities exert

themselves to speak to the great army that is nightly melting away. Scores of my pals went thinking to get a farewell service, knowing the General had told the Cathedral people. If the man in the street only knew what the army abroad and in England is saying, that if it were not for the sake of the King and Empire, it would not be worth fighting just for the sake of the Jews and foreigners that form so large a proportion of our population. Luckily, those abroad have not yet realized that the civil population at home care nothing so long as they can eat, sleep, and make money as of old; when they do, heaven help England. We here who have been in the district under the influence of the abortive sea and air raids (except the Scarborough one) have always maintained that as a lesson to the country and to wake it up (a cruel but necessary lesson) we ought to have retired from the coast and let the Germans land. Instead of rushing to it in thousands and making them realize it was a hopeless job, we could have smashed them to bits once they landed, and whatever harm they did would be amply repaid by waking up the civil population to what is going on. As it is, instead of five million soldiers we have only two million (one and a half of those only seven months trained), and *if* things go against us in the tremendous advance on Germany, when it starts,

we shall be done, for it will then be too late to appeal for and train more men. Still, we shall rumble out of C. one of these nights about 2 o'clock, probably upsetting a few poor civilians' sleep, and shall leave (never willingly to see again) a county of England that is not worth fighting for as regards its population, though, being the largest wheat-growing county, it is doubtless very valuable to the country for that. Do not think I alone am bitter about this (and I don't know why I should worry you about it); the whole regiment, and the — Infantry, the —, and indeed all the division are in the same state of mind, and this general "fed up" feeling we have all suffered from for three months is not due to excessive work, or being kept in England, but at the apathy shown in England and the lack of support by the country. As regards the Church, the less said, perhaps, the better; they are asleep. Here and there a man wakes up, like the sporting Bishop of London, who leaves his See during Easter for the front, where he and his brother bishops have a male flock already of one million men, with, as a rule, two chaplains to a division (our division has two for the 50,000 men). This is and has been my only grumble during the war, and I should say nothing of it were it not that the same is in all men's mouths, chiefly, of course, those who in ordinary times

would sooner enter one beershop than fifty churches.

March 27th, 1915.

Thank you both so much for your letters and prayers, both invaluable to me and very cheering. We are delighted to be actually going at last, and we leave 3 a.m. Monday morning for where we don't know, but hear it may be Havre, and we shall be busy all to-morrow (Sunday) getting ready and clearing up here.

Well, this can, I fear, only be just a wee note to bid you good-bye, as I wish I could do in person, and to say that I look forward, D.V., to a summer holiday at T.; as we have now four million men under arms we ought to be able to make a good show and bash the Germans. Last night a sentry of ours was shot by a figure he challenged three times about 11 p.m. He was shot in the leg as he gave the third challenge and began to load, but he was able to finish loading and send three shots in return, which, of course, missed, as he felt too shaky to aim properly; the beast, whoever he was, got away safely. The third incident of similar nature with our battery. Well, I fear I must go now, hoping to see you again soon, still both of you hale and hearty and free from rheumatism, which I am

sorry to hear you have both had this winter. May God watch over our old home and the dear saints in it and comfort you all in this time of anxiety and stress.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE FRONT

March 29th, 1915.

HERE we are with our horses duly watered and fed on the dock station platform and are awaiting embarkation in the good ship —, bound for —. I can't be more explicit even if I knew, as I am writing this at His Majesty's expense and diddling the Government out of id. stamp. Well, we have had a weird night. It took us from midnight till 5.40 a.m. to ride—at a walk—to Witham and entrain there, after which we got a few nods in the train and found ourselves still running round the outskirts of London and through Woking at 8.30 a.m., and here about noon. We don't know when we embark, but the 3rd battery haven't arrived yet. Well, we had a magnificent and inspiring send-off. One belated man and his wife waved at us as we passed through Chelmsford and one policeman bid us good luck, otherwise we have sneaked out of England stealthily and one can hardly believe the finality of the business. Passing through the London stations was a bit more

exciting, and our blobbed and variegatedly painted guns caused much comment. Well, I cannot go on, as here is the 3rd battery train, and we shall have to make room for them. The vet. officer is running through our horses finally and casting any unfits (only three) out of our battery, and remounts are here ready to take their place.

Not a word was spoken from harnessing in to the time we got into the train on pain of arrest. I had to ride 200 yards in front of the battery as outpost guard, a man with a red lamp riding just behind, to warn any motorists that troops were coming. Then the rest of the battery staff and then the guns and "them waggins" (ammunition wagons).

April 1st, 1915.

I wouldn't miss some of our experiences for worlds, and it is so interesting to have for once the 'Tommies' point of view and to hear what they think and see what they do when they are, so to speak, not on show before an officer or a war correspondent. We have a fair sprinkling of gentlemen in the 2nd battery and all are jolly good fellows to work with, though somewhat mixed. Talking of war correspondents, I understand they are all interned in Paris, and they "draw" their "copy" much as we draw our

rations, duly weighed and carefully prepared. We are in a barn here, 120 or thereabouts of us, together with two young calves; happily a low rail does confine the actions of the latter to a six foot square portion of it. But, like the barn—they smell.

We revelled in a wash this morning, the first most of us have been able to get since leaving England on Sunday, though some—unlike myself, who was unlucky enough to be a picket on board—got a sort of penny wash on the steamer. We entrained in cattle trucks (there was only one civilized coach for the officers); eight horses, four at each end of truck and two men and all the saddlery appointments, instruments, etc., piled together between the eight for twenty-four hours' journey. Sleeping through the night was the funniest; four times I was awakened by one or other of the horses pawing my leg and body, and my pal was pawed, luckily only just touched, in the face; they were very restive the first few hours and kept pawing saddles, straps, girths, feed-bags, etc., under themselves, which in the pitch dark, no lights allowed, were difficult to salve.

1.30 p.m. I had just been detailed to go with a party of officers, signallers, rangetakers and staff—a little party of ten men to go into the firing line by motor for instruction. Got ready,

paraded and everything, but unfortunately they had to reduce the party to eight to fit the cars, and the senior signallers were taken—those two who have been in corps for two or three years. I feel awfully mad, as it would have been a lovely ride and a good experience and look round, but I think the battery will follow for its spell of duty in a few days' time. I hope so, as we shall all go stale at the work unless we get some actual experience.

This is very pretty country round here, all well under cultivation.

8.30. Just turned in. My sleeping-place and that of two other men is the two calves' inner room, six feet long by five feet broad, the two little rooms being partitioned off from the rest of the interior of the barn ; but as regards room we are better off than the rest, who are packed so tight they cannot straighten their limbs and there is much interlocking of boots. I remember when acting "Trinculo" in *The Tempest*, at one of our school plays, it fell to my lot to say that "Adversity acquaints a man with strange bedfellows." I little thought that the words were prophetic and that I should fulfil them myself fourteen years later ! Certain of the other fellows talk of rats running over them. This afternoon we had to ourselves, and I spent it buying small things at the three or four small

épiceries, just for the practice at French. I can get on very well myself, but either I am getting a bit deaf or else they don't speak their own language properly, for I have to make them repeat it all. Anyhow, I have gathered that we and the French on October 8th drove the Germans out of the village, a fact testified by many graves on the main road. The local *Debits de Boisson*, which is apparently their rotten way of saying "inn," gave me an evening's amusement; but the stuffiness is inconceivable, and can only be brought about by the wood painted-in windows, and charcoal oven, of the French inn, combined with the presence of twenty men, eating pea soup. I commend to your housewifely notice a good tip, that is, to save room on a fireplace when you are busy cooking, boil eggs in the pea soup as these French dames do!

Of the French soldiers we have seen no very noble specimens, though all we have met or passed have been very genial and enthusiastic at our presence.

At 3 a.m. during our long train journey we stopped to get to the food and forage truck. French Tommies brought us a kindly meant but filthy concoction of coffee and rum. They said it was "café and brarndee," but if it was brandy it was very rum brandy.

Easter Eve, April 3rd, 1915.

There has been more or less intermittent firing going on not many miles away, and judging from memory (I should be glad of a good ordnance map of France and Belgium) and since acquired knowledge we seem to be in the centre rear of a horseshoe opposition. The sky is lit up at night by star shells and searchlights, the former—as a dragoon expressively puts it—enabling one to see a flea crawling across a penny ! The star shells burst above the ground and give a brilliant white light for a few seconds—magnesium, I should think.

The part we are in is very much like an undulating Fen district, without the dykes and drains, but with the fen trees denuded of branches except just at the top, a weary, eye-aching country that seems to lack *soixante centimes* for a pot of paint ; everything looks poverty-stricken, tumble-down and paintless, and the clothes of the peasants and such soldiers as we have seen, dingy and squalid. Of course we have seen little or nothing of the populous towns, but the railway rolling stock is notably a poor effort, the “firsts” that the officers travelled in being much like a “third” we would find on the Furness Railway or some other antediluvian British railway.

Most of the small shopkeepers in this village

know our coinage, all of which is freely current, and can conduct their business with us in staccato English phrases. But I for one am determined to inflict on them the full force of my French, and doubtless make many false quantities and declensions; but they understand, and become excessively voluble in return. A friend—also a signaller—apparently wasn't so successful, as on going out last night to get acid drops he couldn't express himself decently and came back crest-fallen with liquorice gums, a confection he abominates; but they had been thrust on his unwilling hands, a poor tribute to his French. For my part, I have searched the street (three shops and two pubs) for *un petit miroir*, six inch diameter or so, as I have lost mine, but am assured the nearest place at which I can get one is — (by jove, I nearly told you then), about two kilos off, but we are not allowed there, the limit of our perambulations being a strip of road 500 yards long, a farmyard which is one vast manure heap, and a field which is one big evil drain! So I must needs shave with a borrowed mirror for the rest of my military existence. To-morrow being Easter Day, I propose unwinding my puttees in honour of the day, for the first time since Palm Sunday morning. I plume myself that it is a credit to the regiment to be able to keep one's puttees correctly wound for a long

week of riding, sleeping in the train on a muddled heap of "appointments," and scuffling about on picket in the hold of a boat. That is one useful thing they taught us in the Warwick Yeomanry.

You would laugh to see my horse. I have one detailed to me now. He certainly was built for comfort rather than speed, though I can get him to flounder along at a fair pace even with my bagman's bundles and Father Christmas telephone appointments hung round me, the total weight of which, I feel sure, doubles my own. Most of the gees in our battery are not the true artillery type (smallish but stocky); the drivers' horses are mostly large, heavily built, as you would see driving light railway vans in England, and mine at present is in a lesser degree one of these, not a proper outrider's horse at all. I have dubbed him "Pickwick," as he is rather a character in the sub-section, and will eat anything from a piece of paper to a case-hardened army biscuit.

The last time I heard from anyone in L.'s Bank, they have sent—so he said—1,100 men out of nearly 4,000 men on the staff, which percentage is higher than the other banks. The L.C. and M. next with over 1,000, B.'s over 550, and yet it is the cry that the "middle class" has not offered for service. To my mind it is the lower middle and artisan classes

that are still shirking about at home, and the British workman will, I hope, be the contempt of nations for all time for the way they have struck work partly for more cash, but chiefly so that, forsooth, they can indulge in their week-end holidays and carousals, at the most critical time this conglomeration of nations, that make up the British, has ever seen since their ancestors painted themselves with woad, for pretty much the same reason that we are adorned in khaki—protective colouring. I have noticed that even in this regiment those who are likely to make the best soldiers of the three classes in it, gentry, artisans, and agricultural, are the first and the last. The artisan is always grousing for his rights and kicking against authority and grumbling at the food, etc., which is probably far more nutritious and better in quantity and quality than he is accustomed to, and he has not that same care for and sympathy for his animals that he has even for his gun, or his machinery in the works at home. This, of course, refers (in my idea) to the Tommy who has to be made useful in six months; but the screw of discipline is gradually growing tighter, and has during the past two months wisely been rather elastic to the independent class that has filled the Territorial regiments.

Here one feels so restricted, passing houses

one must not enter, roads one must not go up—it is ordered whether one shall mount or dismount from animal or train—till I verily believe when I get back home again on my holidays I shall be looking round for a bombardier to ask if I may go and buy a paper at the bookstall! It will be a great joy to be home once more, to be able to use one's intellect and initiative once again, but we want to have been in action first. Once that is accomplished I don't care how soon the business is over, though I'm afraid it's got to be a long job. I cannot imagine where we are to get the trained men from for this tremendous advance in Germany, which has got to be made if the war is to be over quickly; the only thing is that the Germans must have lost their original standing army just as we have and in greater proportion, so that most of the troops opposing us cannot be of very first class quality. The idea of them collapsing from economic pressure doesn't appeal to me at all, as it leaves them with all the honour of having faced many nations and won much land from three of them and having in the end to give way owing to exhaustion of food and munitions. I would much rather feel we could beat them back mile by mile, at any rate till things were *in statu quo* before the war and Belgium and France more intact.

I am able to write at length to-day, as I am

on guard and get spells of four hours off duty, with little to do.

April 8th, 1915.

Until yesterday I have had three days and three nights almost continuous duty, so to-day am slack, only relieving at meal-times. Four of us had some fun last night mending wires ; the plateau just above us and between our lines and the Germans has hundreds of them going to different trenches and batteries, tied up on sticks, etc., about five feet from the ground, and if anything wants doing we crawl out at dusk. We are not allowed there in the day-time, not so much on account of danger, which is minute, but I think for fear of being observed and giving away our position to the enemy. Of all the farm-houses and various villages up there, hardly a house remains unshattered, an awful state of things for the poor people to come back to when the war is over. We signallers of the battery are all billeted in this farm-house, where we have our telephone exchange, the battery being a few hundred yards away, and the rest of the men are in an adjoining barn, so we have got by far the best of it and plenty of floor room to sleep on. The people of the farm are very dirty and exceedingly unobliging, though we do everything for ourselves, of course, and by jove the good dame is somewhat on the make and charges id. for

enough butter to spread on one biscuit, and she takes our candles and anything else she can lay hands upon ! She understands a little French and less English, so we have great fun over our conversations.

Yesterday our battery fired on the Germans for about two hours. I was for the time the signaller with the battery and had the full force of the fun, as they replied with about ten or a dozen rounds, searching for us, the two nearest bursting five and ten yards respectively from A and D guns, the rest bursting all over the place about 400 yards square. It was the first time we had been under close fire, and the gunners were as cool as anything, and, judging from the good results of their firing which came back from the forward observing station, they suffered from no shakiness of nerve. It was a funny experience. You can hear the shells coming with a sound faintly reminiscent of the noise made by a switch-back railway. No one was hit, and it was evident from the fashion of their firing that they have not discovered our battery. To-morrow it will be my turn to go to the forward observing station, which will be interesting; an officer observes, and the signaller telephones the results through to the battery and to the battery commander; a perfectly safe position, as there is a dug-out there.

Old K. of K. doesn't waste troops hanging

about as they did at first in South Africa. We were in the firing line five days after leaving England, and have relieved a Regular battery who were the first to open fire in the war in August ; they have, I suppose, gone on to a more important position. We have got a rum lot of occupations in our battery. A shop manager was laying A gun, an apprentice engineer B gun, an analytical chemist C gun, and a mechanic D gun ! The Sergeant-Major (acting) was a solicitor's clerk, and the signaller a bank cashier ! and the O.C. the son of a late director of Imperial Tobacco Co.—I don't know what he is personally. Other gun “numbers” and signallers were commercial travellers, mechanics, college men, a wine merchant, and a good supply of various clerks ! Truly there will be some chatting over old times when they get back to their business trains !

The Regulars here are awfully indignant at the way immortal regiments have been in action again and again since August, and yet nothing is reported of their doings or whereabouts, and it does not do to mention the London Scottish to them !

CHAPTER VII

IN ACTION

April 6th, 1915.

OUR battery came into action on Easter Sunday night and opened fire yesterday ; the other two have not yet come into place, so we are the first of our brigade and are very pleased thereat. We have come to relieve a Regular lot and are, so they say, the most advanced point of the English line.

When letters do come for us they will come every night up with our food and ammunition, but as yet since we have been on the move none have come to hand since leaving England. We have left our horses and drivers and unused wagons about two miles back, behind a little town from which we promised ourselves we would get our tobacco, chocolate, coffee, etc. But on passing through it in the dusk on the way to our position, we found it devoid of a soul, the whole place a wrecked desolation, roofs and walls blown away, hardly a house without its gaping wound, of those that are standing at all—the church, which looked so fair from a distance, having

many holes blown through it, the tower and spire having been preserved by the German gunners, evidently because they offer a good aiming point from which the guns may be laid. It was a thrilling experience rattling through the dead and wrecked town and over a mile of exposed country, lit up brilliantly every few seconds from the "star shells" which the enemy send up, which show every object clearly like lightning, only that they remain in the air ten to twenty seconds. However, no shells came our way, though firing was going on in all directions, but in a tired, desultory way, and at last we turned off the high road and crept along a hedge towards a fold in the ground near where our position was to be, the guns and wagons, barging and jolting about, often nearly overturning.

By midnight, Easter Sunday, the battery was in position, all but one wagon which lay in a sticky ditch and defied the whole lot of men and horses to get it out for an hour. No one spotted us, and the star shells helped us in the pitch dark a little, and at last we got the beast into position, and the drivers returned with their horses the way we came, and forty weary gunners, with arms nearly pulled out of their sockets, aching in every limb after a long day in the saddle and night in heaving and lugging guns through sticky mud, retired to a farm barn about 200 yards in rear

of the guns and slept like forty tops. The next day was spent in beginning the preparation of dug-outs, the laying our telephone wires to the farm, where there is an exchange to headquarters, the infantry trenches, other batteries, etc., and we opened fire midday, making good practice, so they said at the observing stations. At the latter we signallers will have to relieve one another daily, or *rather* nightly under an officer ; so far I haven't been there. The farm where we are billeted has several shell holes, but they have never discovered the battery which we relieved, which is about fifty yards in rear of our own, and the latter is so well marked that it is impossible to spot it by aeroplane or see it from a distance. Trees upheld by wire have been planted all round each gun, and the whole thing looks like an ordinary thick, pollarded, willow hedge in a flat plain facing a rise over which we fire. The nearest enemy shell fell yesterday about half a mile off ! and as one can see nothing of enemy, friend, trench, or gun, one can hardly imagine a war is on, except for our own ear-splitting roars and the enemy's dull booming. Going through the shattered town on Sunday night stirred our fellows immensely, and if we could only show it to some of the home slackers in its awful reality, I am certain recruits would not be lacking. Last night two of us

signallers at 7 p.m. were told off to go to the infantry trenches telephone exchange under an officer and a guide, and here we are in a farm-house cellar, ten feet by twenty-four, with ten other signal service men of the —, a coke fire in a bucket, many frowsy wet overcoats, and a terrific atmosphere, that can be smelt but not comfortably breathed. We are not far from our own infantry trenches in point of yards, and the huge farm-house under which we are is blown, wrenched and battered by German shells into an untenable mass of wreckage. No one is allowed upstairs in the day. Last night's tramp from our position to this one here in the pelting rain was most weird, and I am waiting now for dusk to return alone, as the officer, the guide, and my pal were recalled last night about 10 p.m. It is about a two-mile tramp, and if you can imagine a high plateau like the top of Cheddar gorge (without the gorge), intersected by roadsavenued by trees of immense height and sparseness, you can picture the walk last night. It is supposed to be sudden death to be seen thereon in the day. Here and there was a tree caught in the middle by a shell closed up on itself like a two-foot rule, some blown away altogether, every now and then a farm-house or barn without a roof, or a roof and perhaps two walls, disembowelled of all else; here and there a few jagged rafters and piles of

shattered brick, all shown up in ghastly suddenness by the star lights. Now and then you pass silent companies of wet-blotting-paper infantry ranged along the roadside waiting to go as reliefs into the trenches, or slush suddenly into a despondent pair of horses drawing a general supply wagon, till at last we come to the farm-house—the officer disappears to his quarters, and we descend into our small cellar, where we are cordially welcomed by the good old Sergeant, as we were by the Scotch battery whom we relieved at our new position.

We come here merely to take charge of the end of our wire in the infantry trenches and to receive or remit messages between infantry and artillery; but, as I say, my palsoo left and I am here alone for twenty-four hours with the jolly fellows. To-night I shall be relieved by another of our signallers and either go out to the forward observing station for twenty-four hours' duty, or remain with the telephone exchange at our battery. Luckily I took note last night of our route by means of ruined chateaux, farms, and clumps of trees, etc., otherwise it might be a job finding my way back to-night, but it will be rather fun. I shall have some great tales to tell you when I return; funnily enough, even out of this war one keeps on getting a lot of humour and fun out of the thing—quaint situa-

tions, oddities of horses and queer fixes we get into and makeshifts we have to put up with. I often lie on our smelly straw and chortle with amusement to hear, for one thing, the variety of tone, calibre and timbre of the snores and other methods of breathing which men use when sleeping with a tunic and greatcoat buttoned tightly up to their necks, or the midnight imprecations when a muddy foot meets the head of a man beneath it in the tiers of human sleepers, and we cover the floor of our barn as closely as the pieces of marble in a mosaic, and are often in as queer shapes ! Of the minor ills that have assailed me personally I have to report a hole burnt in my hat with a candle, whence rain trickles on to my head, an overcoat that never did and never will fit and is scrubby withal to the chin, a big tear in the same, and the loss of a fork, which gives my fingers more work than is fair during the extra stress of war. Any small description I may have given of the towns, farm-houses, etc., is not exaggerated ; in fact, I have rather under- than over-estimated the facts, and have not quoted any of the additional spine-creeping horrors which one hears from men out here, but does not believe all of, though I know for a fact that it wouldn't be pleasant to go through that shattered town, and look on the walls thereof by *daylight*.

Fourteen British soldiers in one group were a fortnight ago destroyed by a shell in one of the streets, and the only evidence after of their presence was there. We, for our part, are as safe as in England, a hidden battery undiscovered by the enemy, and as comfortable as it is possible to be in war time, far more so than the poor infantry in the trenches. The only thing we all have a holy fear of is dirt, and thank goodness, there is a good water supply at one farm. If I have given you an impression of French peasant poverty, squalor and dirt, multiply it ten times for Belgian; the latter is a saturated solution for all three, a flat country whose only decoration is endless manure heaps and jerry-built tumble-down barns, a land of small holdings and justly illustrative of the fact that small holdings do not make a rich country nor a prosperous peasantry. It would be a sight for sore eyes to see a baronial residence or one of the "stately homes of England" and a bit of park land. I have a sort of notion there will be some English letters arrived to-night, and perhaps *Punch* or an English paper. We are in the — Corps under —, whom you know already, so he needs no introduction or eulogy. Our post goes out nightly, but, of course, everything is censored. I have sent you a Field Service postcard more as a curiosity than anything else, as at present no

particular veto has been placed upon writing beyond disclosure of names, places, dispositions, etc., and I don't think the most cunning Teuton could have gathered any material information from my letters. These fellows are a very decent set of men, as the signallers of most regiments seem to be. They wouldn't let me use my own rations which I drew last night for twenty-four hours, viz., four biscuits and one tin of bully ; consequently, I have lived on the fat of the land and had bread—actually bread—and apricot jam for brekker and tea, and hot bacon and potatoes for dinner, *quelques viands*, or “some” meats, as the Americans would say ; and for a Tommy to be hospitable with his rations, which are weighed and served to the cwt., and are not always so luxurious as to afford bread and bacon, is the last word in generosity.

April 17th, 1915.

The Army food itself is good and certainly plentiful, even if there is a degree of sameness about it, and I should think the most wonderful feature of this war is that presented by the various supply corps, whose regularity of transport is almost equal to any great English railway in peace time. Fancy letters daily in the trenches ! and leave home to longer service soldiers just as if they were Bank Holiday excursionists.

In our last station we had opportunity of watching a main road down which there was a ceaseless traffic of motor transports and omnibuses both ways, and the finger-tips of the system are seen in the supply wagon that arrives under cover of darkness each night at this farmhouse, with food, coal, etc., as, of course, nothing is taken from the country except such farm produce as is paid for.

April 9th, 1915.

We are comfortably ensconced in a farmhouse, at least the signallers are, the rest being in a barn, and though we have done a little firing we have only been indirectly fired at for about half an hour, as our position is well hidden. It is interesting work now after all the months' mud-grovelling and grooming that winter imposed upon us, and apart from occasional window-shaking bangs you would never imagine a war was going on, as the view is distinctly peaceful and pastoral, or rather agricultural, and nothing can be seen of any engine of destruction, and only occasionally an "engineer" of destruction wandering across a field. I should judge that I am rather nearer you now than when I am at home.

One naturally gets very fed up at times, and then in comes the post with the best tonic in the world. This seems such a wearying war,

doesn't it, both for those at home and abroad, slow moving, constant standing by inertly and with little to show what or when the ultimate end will be, though we are all sure *what* it will be—success for the Allies.

We daily see a flail in use at this farm, a thing I only once remember seeing in my life before. They are beating out beans, the threshing floor being part of the barn where the gunners are billeted. The agricultural implements and methods altogether seem most antiquated here. You were very kindly asking me what we most need here. Well, until my clothes wear out, it is very little, but the most useful things to receive are papers, writing paper and envelopes, and chocolate and cigarettes. H. sends *Punch* every week; the first arrived with the letters yesterday, and all of us are enjoying it. The cigarettes are useful, too, though I smoke few myself. Chocolate is always and continually useful; we all eat pounds of it owing to night duties, etc., and sudden moves without being able to get meals; also it staves off the need for eating biscuit, which although nourishing and not unpalatable, are desperately hard and might be called "The Dentist's Friend." Apart from that, food is plentiful and good, unless on the move. We get a slab of bacon for "brekker," and bully (or ordinary tinned) beef for dinner,

and now I hear while we are stationary we are to have bread alternate days ; apart from that we can and do buy eggs 2d. each, butter two francs a pound, and milk $\frac{1}{2}$ d. half a glass, so you'll know we are feeding on the fat of the land considering that we are at war. I must say I miss my cold tub in the morning ! But we have had to put up with nothing as compared to those poor beggars who have been in the infantry trenches all the winter.

April 24th, 1915.

I am to-day doing my weekly turn at the infantry trench headquarters, a slow job with little to do but yarn and sleep in a cellar, punctuated by occasional hostile shellings ; but there has been none to-day nearer than 200 yards. This farm here is one of the most historical in the war, as I shall be able to tell you when I come back. It has been held and re-held in turn by Germans and ourselves.

April 29th, 1915.

The Germans yesterday shelled and set fire to a row of little cottages near our observing station, and, consequently, burnt through six wires, four of which were our connection with the observers, so T. and I went out to mend them. We were able to approach most of the way along

a new trench which was apparently their target, but this ended at the road where the burning houses were, and we had to crawl along the road *ventre à terre*, being freely sniped at, as they evidently had marksmen trained on the exit of the trench. We are both safely back now, though at the time neither of us thought we had much chance of being so lucky, as we had to do most of the job before dusk, it being impossible where so many wires of different regiments and batteries cross and re-cross to follow out and join up four of our own in the dark. Just after dark up came an old man and woman with a mule and three-wheeled cart (we were on the job from 4 to 9 p.m.). The woman was weeping bitterly, as all that was left of their home—their whole world—was a glowing furnace with not more than three feet height of wall left to show where their house had been. We put the old woman safely behind some sandbags while the man searched for anything of their household gods that was left; half an hour's search brought nothing more than a bucket, a tea-pot, and one or two other metal odds and ends, and their cat. I never saw anything so pitiable in my life as their departure, the old woman—about 60—trailing along ten yards behind the cart, reluctantly and constantly looking back at the little place that had probably

sheltered them for the whole of their lives, the whole scene flickering redly for a hundred yards on either side of the road, where other cottages were burning. We felt very helpless and could do little beyond giving her a bit of chocolate and what little cash we had, enough, one hopes, to get them to the nearest living town, where they can get into touch with relief committees and perhaps be sent to England. The thing that upset us most, however, was that the poor old couple were under sniping fire until we put them behind the sandbags, and when they went off we just followed them till a turn in the road took them out of range. After that we sat in a ditch and made remarks about the Kaiser that aren't fit for reproduction in secret code.

Altogether it was an exciting night, the shots coming about every minute or minute and a half ; doubtless later they must have bagged some poor beggar, as at about ten or eleven the reliefs would be passing that spot. Until we got to the observing station we were afraid the latter, with our officer and two signallers, must be blown to bits and burning ; but, strange to say, the tumble-down old barn was untouched. Probably it looks too tumbledown to be used for human habitation for twenty-four hours. The Germans are shelling the road in front of us (the battery) now ; the nearest burst about 100 yards away, but they

have gradually decreased their range and got farther away from us, evidently "searching" fire to find out where we are.

Bang ! That's about the thirtieth they've sent over ; good German money wasted ! Here's another. Hooray ! I expect our reply will come this evening, and, judging from the golden opinions the infantry give vent to, to each of our signallers that go there nightly, our firing is jolly effective. A farm-house roof has just been bent in by another of their shells ; they're getting spiteful, and there will be more shell holes to dodge to-night in the road *en route* to the infantry. As it is, our risks of broken ankles are greater, I imagine, than those of shell fire.

May Day, 1915.

I have "wangled" another man's candle and am sitting on the floor of the passage (where we sleep) in this farm-house. I have come to the conclusion that there is not enough spring in bricks, and the night is usually divided into periods of resting first one and then another portion of one's anatomy as it "goes to sleep" on the hard floor ; generally—worse luck—one's head goes to sleep last ! I have written a jingle for the slackers of B., who are many. A little mild and humorous sarcasm won't hurt them.

B. has done disgracefully in comparison of proportion to other cities, and the recruiting was half-hearted and so unlike the cheering spontaneous crowds of L., B., and M.

I had a rare luxury the other day—a bath in a bucket of water. It had to be done on the installment plan, and I may say that our daily ablutions, though meagre, are a source of unbounded astonishment to the woman and her man who still stay here ! It is a phase of daily life that doesn't enter into their domestic economy, and for anyone to try and get clean when they will presently be as dirty again is mild but innocent foolishness. Madame certainly does wipe her hands on her soiled apron before bringing you half a franc's worth of butter in the palm of her hand, but whether with the object of cleaning the apron or the hands we have never yet been able to determine. From the state of the butter, however, expert opinion leans towards the former. Monsieur—but I hardly like to tell you of it—(hand the letter over to H. to read !)—Monsieur does not wear braces, but there is a button of tremendous responsibilities which just keeps his bifurcated garment hooked round his hips. He works hard with a flail ; we look on shaking with apprehension. I know it will happen one day. Apart from that, they flourish, as they charge “Inglis soldats” very firm prices on the con-

stantly reiterated principle, "You plenty money, me nix." Yes, heaps of it, my good woman, one shilling and twopence halfpenny a day—highly skilled labour at that !

12.30. Like an ass I brought in some straw for a pillow instead of being satisfied with my knobbly haversack ; the consequence is I have spent the last five minutes killing small beetles and weird flies that can only exist in this insanitary country. Now for the rest of the night my imagination will play more havoc with me than all the beetles and flies in a stack. I wish I hadn't noticed the things. Talking of creeping things, we have Saxons and Bavarians opposite us just now. About a fortnight ago, when they were being relieved last, it is on record that they put up a notice on one of their front trenches : "The Prussian Guard are relieving us ; give them Hel (igoland)." The British Tommy, always willing to oblige, gave them what was good for them. N.B.—No more straw for me ! To think that one man is responsible for all this business, beetly straw and all. I feel like uttering the words of Caliban (who, too, lived in a waterlogged land) : "All the infections that the sun sucks up, from bogs, fens, flats, on Kaiser fall, and make him by inch-meal a disease !" Caliban was a loathly person, but his opinion and feeling towards Prospero just about hits

off mine to His Imperial Majesty Blood and Iron of Hohenzollern.

May 1st, 1915.

So many thanks for the parcel of books, papers, and food, one of THE good old wholesome tea-cakes. The tongue is going to be kept for tomorrow's dinner, when we eight signallers are going to have a beanfeast. We caught a cabbage to-day, a sturdy, tough old thing of last year's hatching, and boiled it—the first green food since September last ! But it was not a success, and the stalk part even refused to be cut by knives when cooked. But we get such a howling lot of fun out of these and similar absurdities of present-day life that it was worth the trouble. From your letter, I fear you are worrying about me and about C. when he gets abroad. He certainly must be careful, as he is an officer, but we are as safe as houses here, and perhaps that is a bad simile in Belgium, where houses are razed to the earth ; but, at any rate, we are so well concealed that the Germans can't find out *our* exact whereabouts though we pot away at them, and have to-day made their trenches very comfortless to live in. We are just having a holiday in gorgeous weather with just a soupçon of excitement in it. I only tremble to think what our rate of income tax

will be when we return. What a magnificently energetic and disciplined nation we shall be after it ; we were fast sinking into the enervating sloth and love of peace that brought goodness knows how many Empires to pot—see if I know them ! ! ! Assyria, Greece, Rome, Egypt, or does the latter come in the middle ? So do the things I learnt at your knee come rolling back at you from a flippant offspring—to cheer you up ! ! ! Anyhow, I am well and as happy as it is possible to be without my little better half. I have had a grand plethora of letters the last two days, and papers galore, but I always like those you send ; it is nice to see the stately old *Times* occasionally, so dignified in style and free from the heart-failure headlines and general racy self-advertisement that characterizes the *Mail*—your pet *Anathema Maranatha*.

To-night we signallers have had a little sing-song. As it was raining we got a fire together in a wee outhouse—no fires, of course, allowed in the open or any lighted windows—and pegged away at “Annie Laurie” and other old ballads, not to mention coon songs and ragtime, finishing up that section of the programme with “Rule, Britannia,” and all the Allies’ National Anthems that we could remember. Then came the Nunc Dimittis, an old camp favourite, “Pleasant are Thy courts above,” and the “Can a woman’s

tender care" hymn, which, when we suddenly broke out into the other day in parts, laid out the woman of the farm (who lives here still) in tears. I can't honestly say we remembered all the words, but the rendering was fervent for all that, as the hymns probably presented eight different pictures of home ! And the eight men concerned (an unkempt, ill-dressed, rummy lot of beggars we looked, too, in the half-light of the fire) as in duty bound finished up with "God Save the King," so that if His Majesty is given to mental telepathy he must have heard a raucous noise at 10 p.m., May Day, 1915.

May 3rd, 1915.

I have had one or two exciting days, and nights too, wire mending within the last week, as we have had some heavy shelling in our neighbourhood that has smashed a lot of wires and totally destroyed a small village. We have had to get a new observing station, as the old one became too "unhealthy." But we are so well hidden they can't find our exact spot, and can only waste thousands of pounds searching for the most part with H.E. (high explosive shell), which not only blows off the end of the shell and spreads the bullets in a cone like ordinary shrapnel, but it blows the shell itself into atoms and the direction

of burst is backwards as well as forwards, so they are more uncomfortable than the others. A shell has just this minute fallen twenty yards from our battery without exploding, where it will be left to cool its heels for a bit.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SIGNALLERS' DAY

May 1st, 1915. 1.45 a.m.

I DON'T think I have ever got up so early in the morning to write ! I have not long been roused for my spell of telephone duty, and am off again at 3 a.m. This is at the farm-house exchange, where we are connected with our guns and other batteries and regiments, this being one of the jobs, as well as going to the infantry trench headquarters (from which I got home at 8 p.m. last night) and the observing stations. When not doing any of these signaller's duties we do a turn on the guns as a "gun number" and help to send "plenty souvenir pour les Allemands." The last two days T. and I have had some rather exciting wire-mending in daylight. It is good fun, the only drawback being the weight of the wire reel apparatus and the telephone instrument ; the latter is for tapping in to make sure both ends of a wire are in communication with one another, or to find who is at the end of a wire that appears derelict. It has

been lovely weather for a fortnight and is now very hot. Flags, of course, we have not used since we have been out here; to do so would both give away positions and also ask for bullets. So far the enemy have been unable to get the range or exact position of our guns, they are so well concealed, though they know we are hereabouts by the direction of our fire and the contour of the ground, and search occasionally with their shells. When one of their planes are about none of our batteries fire that are in its visual range, so that it cannot note the position of the "battery flashes," and all the men go underground, so that the country just presents a peaceful, innocent look; as soon as the plane is driven off by one of ours, which usually happens pretty soon, we pop up again like rabbits and let fly at them again if we had been firing at the time.

I have just interrupted myself to ring up all round and see if everyone is O.K. at 2 a.m. Now, having a wire from the switchboard on to one ear, I can hear all sorts of weird Morse calls going on from other regiments and batteries to one another; we do the same little game every half hour. Occasionally you hear someone "tapping in" from somewhere in the open where he is following a broken wire—a series of dots, and then a faint voice: "That the Glorsters?"

Second weak voice (probably from induction on a crossing wire): "Now! You'm on the Wurricks." First weak voice: "Must be on the wrung wire then." Me: "Who do you want, Gloster Artillery or Gloster Infantry?" and so on. Thus does the British Army keep in touch in a war where there are more men engaged than ever before in the history of the world, and yet as a rule you can gaze over the landscape and not see twenty soldiers together in a survey of two square miles. It makes us laugh sometimes; we gaze at one another—men with hair *clipped* short—earning 1s. 2½d. per diem, and any one of us would give a sovereign to be able to have the cold morning tub again. Rummy war—this!

We signallers do our own cooking, as our work renders meal-times somewhat shifting and irregular, the "off duty" men usually doing the job under a heavy fire of criticism. There is generally some particular catastrophe each day of the week at breakfast—the only meal we trouble to cook for—such as the frying-pan and all the bacon therein catching fire, or the upsetting of the whole lot into the ashes—for we cook in a bucket in the yard. But through it all, unfailing in quantity, though various in quality, is our chief condiment—dirt—and very palatable it is, too, when you have cooked it yourself and have,

so to speak, a fatherly interest in it. I am becoming a marvel at cooking, and can frizzle meat and do what the woman calls potarto fritz (potato fritters) with less dirt in the mixture than any, and fifty per cent. less than the regimental cooks ! Now don't laugh if I tell you that when the veto is withdrawn I am going to bathe in a Jack Johnson hole, of which there are hundreds round here, anything from six to thirty feet in diameter and four to six feet deep, and full of clear water that has drained in. At present, owing to our bodies not being khaki-coloured, and there being a lot of planes about, we are not yet allowed to do so. I regret to say that gun fire has stopped my little wrist watch. I fear the spring is broken, a real loss to me for its association and utility.

THE GRAVES IN THE WOOD

There is a hallowed spot in Belgium—one of many such in this land of death—through which two soldiers chanced to pass. It is a peaceful, sweet smelling pine-wood on a low hill, carpeted with fir cones and pine needles, draped with green shrubs and undergrowth and ferns, with here and there a clump of violets, or ragged robin to give a tinge of colour ; and on this lovely hot spring morning,

with the songs of thousands of birds ringing through the branches, the whole atmosphere is redolent of one of the gentler slopes of North Wales. But there are signs of horror in this wood that are not to be met with, thank God, in Wales—lanes and gaps blasted by shells through the trees, leaving jagged stumps and poles bleeding their aromatic resin—bayonet gashes and bullet-torn holes in the trunks, here and there rifle pits and observation dug-outs half filled with water, here and there a clip of cartridges or a torn piece of clothing, the whole telling a tale of the awful scenes that took place here not many months ago. Yet in the midst of it all, in the thickest part of the wood, are some fifty graves covered now with ever-growing soft green moss and a profusion of wild flowers, planted by rough hands.

Here lie men of three dialects, but whose last aim was a common one—men of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, the Suffolk Regiment, and the Seaforth Highlanders. I venture to think that those whose honoured dead are lying there could wish them no lovelier spot, consecrated perhaps not by the Church, but by the glories of the surroundings and the sacrifice of those who sleep there.

The soldiers had hardly finished reading the inscriptions on the neatly made wooden crosses

when the woods became once more a raging inferno under heavy shell fire, brambles crashing down, and splintered shell and shrapnel bullets whining and whirring overhead, or ripping scars of earth up before burying themselves deep and soon. One hundred and forty-four shells burst over and in the wood of a few hundred feet square, while the two living lie down side by side with the dead, sheltered in some small degree by their graves, until after an hour of wellnigh unbearable racket and strain the shelling stops—no further sound is heard, those birds that are not blown to atoms being terrified into silence. Many of the flowers on the graves are battered to pulp or torn wholesale out of the ground, but by a miracle the two are unhurt ; and the dead sleep on in peace beyond the power of hurt—their duty done, their oath to their King faithfully kept, their most precious possession given up for others. “They have done what they could.”

This wood with the awkward halting name will one day be the loving pilgrimage of a few ; let us hope it will not become the excursion of the thousand, clamorous, with tightly clasped franc in hand, for admittance to gaze with morbid interest and loud-voiced comment upon the steel-riven wood and the quiet resting-places of those who gave their lives to gain it.

May 17th, 1915.

There is such heaps to write about and yet so little that the censor would pass that it seems to me all my letters must be alike. Things are going fairly well out here the last day or two, though strange to say our bit of front that we are firing on has not been so active; but we all have a feeling that sooner or later, between now and Christmas, there will be an "almighty bust up." In the meantime we and the enemy shell one another in a friendly way, and rifle fire is more or less continuous from dusk to dawn, during which time it is unfortunately the business of us signallers to mend broken wires, and otherwise barge around; but it is great fun, and we all enjoy it really and generally feel sick of it if we are on battery duty and therefore not free to go out as linesmen. Four of us had a jaunt the other day right up to the reserve trenches of the S. Regiment (whoa! boy, I nearly gave it away then), where our wire connecting the infantry trenches with us had got broken by shell or rifle fire. We were on the game from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. the night before last, May 15th and 16th, during which time a lively fusillade was going on between our trenches and "them germings," making it very unhealthy for us, as bullets were whining about all the while and crashing through the hedge behind us, and once when we were lying down and

hopping in to a wire to see who it belonged to, a star-shell went up, and I suppose some keen-eyed beggar spotted us, because five rounds rapid came just over our heads, so we moved on another twenty yards ! The difficulty was to find out which was our wire out of about eight that were going across country in our direction, but we spotted it after tapping in three times. We found we could get in communication with the battery but not with the trenches, which meant the break was still beyond us—it was, in fact, beyond the reserve trench over which we tumbled—after being challenged by a very young officer very astonished to see us there. The beastly wire then ran along a hedge, but too high to hold on to and follow with the hand ; but at last we came to about fifty yards of loose wire coiled at the bottom of a tree with one end going up into the tree and off again in our right direction. Some careful but foolish idiot, seeing the broken wire, had pulled it all in, and the other end was fifty yards away, but in which direction across the field we hadn't the remotest notion—anyhow, it took two hours to find, any number of bullets dodging about at such a pace that constituted a danger to the public ! A man named C. was making a reef knot in the wire while another, F., and myself held the ends, when one vicious beggar plunked into a tree that we were all

leaning against. I reckon war ought to be carried on by means of bladders on sticks; it would then be much safer and pleasanter for all parties concerned ! The best of it was that we called at a battered farmhouse—the infantry headquarters—and saw their signaller sergeant, who is supposed to know the directions and positions of all wires leading to his cellar; but we couldn't get him to come out with us, as they were expecting an active night in the trenches. So we felt it our duty to pull his leg loud and long over the telephone the next morning. I don't think he was funky really, but only wanted to turn in and get a good night's rest, as he had been on a similar job the previous night. Coming back, still pitch dark, we nearly fell over some men in the road—about half a mile back, they covered in two rows about 100 yards—poor beggars of engineers who were trying to get an hour or two's rest before dawn after spending the night digging and barbed wire fencing, etc. But for the two sentries at each end, they looked for all the world like so many orderly corpses. Now and then one would sit up and try and cover his feet with his overcoat or turn round and mutter something in his sleep—one whom we kicked against muttered to some purpose; but for the most part they lay there almost invisible and in ghostly silence, a most pathetic picture.

Wherever we came upon such parties or in the trenches the same old formula had to be gone through. We should be stopped sharply about ten yards before we got to the sentry. "Halt, who goes there?"—"G—— artillery linesmen"—"Advance one and be *reckernized*"—"Right oh! pass, four of yer." And so we filed past, an Oxford man, a fine-art photographer, an engineer, and a bank cashier, thundering thankful to have whole skins still, and able to earn another 1s. 2½d. from the Government by living another day through. Rum world, isn't it! We were discussing on our way back what would happen if the ordinary Regular soldier stood out for an eight-hours' day and overtime or one and a half pay for nights and Sundays as his beery civilian confrères do! As we got back to our position (about a two-mile walk) it was just getting lighter, and a nightingale and a lark were yelling at the top of their voices, a lovely contrast to the dull, thunder-like rumble of guns that has never ceased much for days on right and left, and often develops into an ear-splitting pandemonium on our own front, and also the noise of the rifle fire in the trenches, which is exactly like two very erratic carters piling bricks up on a stack from a cart; then a fusillade, one carter loses his temper and knocks the whole stack down, then they begin building it up again;

finally they are satisfied with plonking a brick down every three seconds, then a rush again, then a fusillade again, then silence for perhaps three minutes, then through the whole gamut all through the night. They are at it now while I write, with the occasional accompaniment of a Maxim gun, which will rap out five or ten or twenty rounds at the rate of 666 per minute, and then remain in sulky silence for an hour. "It would be funny if it were not so sad," as our Brigadier used to say of any mistakes made—for they manage to maim or kill a man here and there. Well, I fear I have made an ordinary incident into an extraordinarily long yarn. But I like to give you the real thing with its local colour, but unexaggerated and free from the everlasting journalistic blather that spoils the descriptive efforts of so many of the younger journalists—who are usually allowed to come up and describe a battle that is going on ten miles in front of them ! But I see the latest gag of the older journalists is to write long articles under their photographs and have themselves described as "Mr. W., the greatest military authority and critic." Or "Mr. F., whose knowledge of naval matters is unsurpassed." Probably you'd find that Mr. F. couldn't tell you the difference between a picket boat and an officer's cutter, and Mr. W. would confound a surcingle-pad with a trail-

spade gear, or imagine a drag-rope was the same as a throat-lash. Probably their knowledge of strategy and tactics—which they so finely criticize—would be as exhaustive as their technical knowledge.

I myself have seen a photo—lyingly alleged to be "somewhere in France with our gallant gunners"—obviously taken on Salisbury Plain at any rate months before the war, as the harness on the horses is such as has not been used during the war, but was discarded, I believe, in autumn, 1913. But it doesn't matter, for the men in the picture are probably out in the war with the same guns and horses.

I am awfully sorry to have to use such old and grubby bits of paper, but I am at the end of my tether, and unless some comes to-morrow, as I expect it will, I shall have to write my letters by picking the required words out of the newspaper, cutting them out and numbering them in order, which would be a tedious job! I was delighted to hear from H. the other day; I wonder if he saw any of the Suez fighting. I also hear C. is now on the "Plain," and under orders for France at an unknown date; he may be here now; how jolly it would be if we met. Better still if his regiment came into action in front of us; we should be supporting them then. I wish, however, he wasn't an officer, as they simply

throw their lives away here to ensure that any given object is successfully carried out or any trench taken that is ordered to be taken. Never, I should think, were armies better led, certainly never with so little training and experience, and I hope it will be able to be said that never were officers better followed. But time will show. The last three days have been rotten weather for the war—rain nearly all day and night—but it had been lovely for three weeks prior to that.

I have written a few verses for recruiting and had them put in the *W. D. P.*; probably H. has sent you a copy. The following I have rattled off to-night and am sending to the same people :

QUIT YOU LIKE MEN !

'Twas the voice of the laggard, I heard him complain,

"They've plastered the walls with those posters again—

'Your comrades are calling'—'Your life's not your own'—

Why the devil can't they leave a fellow alone ?
I'm howled at from hoarding, housewall, hedge and ditch

By King and by Country, by Belgium and
'Kitch.'

Why should I leave my job—mess about with a gun
And be maimed, just as likely as not, by the Hun?
Besides, just consider the home ties I've got.
Let the street loafers go, they're the men for the
spot.

The soldier's profession's for loafers and earls,
They want chaps like me to look after the girls."

'Twas the voice of his Country that answered :

" I warn

You, the ' MAY ' of to-night shall be ' MUST ' with
the dawn.

Thou fool ! offer now, lest in scorn I demand
The skill of your brain and the might of your
hand.

Nay! your only possession of worth gladly give—
Your life, so your death cause your Country
to live.

Behold your inheritance ! Whence has it come ?
By the might of the men who have followed the
drum ;

An Empire ruling one-fourth of mankind ;
Your fathers died for her, you follow behind ;
In your keeping they left her. Your fathers
whose bones

In every land lie strewn as thick as the stones.
Is their sacrifice made and their blood shed in vain?
Then the brand's on your forehead—the hall-
mark of Cain."

Now no more this journey. I must turn in as I am on duty at 6 a.m. to-morrow.

May 27th, 1915.

J. wanted to know when we get our food, letters, etc. A gunner fetches the letters from the Field P.O. daily, and we get them about 4 p.m. Parcels come with the food stores about 5 p.m., when the general supply wagon and water come up by a roundabout way. They used to come at night along a road in full view of German observers, but now the back lanes have been mended they can get here by two or three devious ways under shelter of the slight rising ground between us and the enemy. They waste a lot of ammunition searching for us and the other batteries. We don't trouble so much about their guns, but knock their trenches about in fine style.

As for food, the gunners who are in their dug-outs by day and sleep in a barn at night have it cooked mid-day (hot tea morning and night) and brought to the gun position, where they line up to receive it in mess tins. We signallers sleep in a passage floor in the farm where we have all our wires (more in number than the hairs of my head) and do our own cooking in an outhouse where Madame has the pigwash tub! the latter being most useful and saves us digging

a waste pit for scraps. Poor pigs—tea-leaves, bacon fat, biscuit and jam all go towards the local dairy-fed pork. We do little cooking now, as we can't get all the signallers together for any given meal, and meat is often of tremendous altitude! So we live on tea—bread and jam and parcels—rarely a day passes without one of us or more getting a parcel to “whack” round. Signallers on distant or night duty take a loaf of bread (which we get four days out of six) and jam. Bully beef is taboo. You cannot get anyone to eat it—one portion of our trenches that I have seen has a pavement of unused bully tins, and when sleeping in the cellar at the infantry headquarters we have all used a parapet of them to keep rats and beetles off our bed. The cellar is pitch dark, 5 ft. by 11 ft. and about 4 ft. 8 in. in height. The outer part, which is palatial, is used as the telephone room. I can stand upright in it and just touch the ceiling. This is about 8 ft. by 14 ft., and nine men sleep there, two being always on duty at the telephone. Great spree; whatever time of day or night you wake up you can always hear messages going through, and generally a medley from both operators, unless it is in Morse.

First Op.—“What! ’ave they copped old Charloi?”

Second Op.—"Yessir, you say you want the rachin (ration) party to coom along at wance?"

First Op.—"Copped 'im in the arm, have they?"
Pohwer ole Char——"

Second Op.—"What's that, sir? Oh, yer blighter, I thought you was the Captin. What's that? Shake oop yer insterment—ah said, shake it oop. That's better! Them rachins abeen sent alung a hour ago. Speckt a shell's took them."

First Op.—"What time are they bring-ging gim in?" etc., etc.;

till you drop off again glad that you aren't one of the ration party or a casualty in the trenches. Get up just before dawn when it is darkest or when a mist is about and you see the casualties brought into the stable for rough dressing; or, a grim and terrible thing to watch at 3 a.m., as I did—the sewing up in a blanket and carrying out to the grave, always ready dug just outside, but unapproachable in daytime. The regimental doctors are a fine set of men; most of their work comes at night, and the stretcher men are a very decent lot, and will always offer the artillery signaller some hot tea, which they seem to keep going day and night; good stuff, strong mother's meeting sort of tea with a lavish supply of sugar

in it, but it is *the* drink and the one we all live on here. Sometimes we take them an egg or two from our position and exchange it for one of their Maconochies (issued only to infantry, a thing to dream of)—lumps of meat, vegetable and gravy all cooked together in a tin that only needs heating and opening; and Solomon in all his glory never had such a meal.

We had another cricket match against a battery near by of new Regulars and beat them 67—32; the plane whistle went in the middle and we all had to lie down where we were for a few minutes, but they are rarely enemy planes.

Someone was asking if we ever had any services. Barring the infantry graveyard I haven't seen a chaplain since we came out. It would be impossible for them to visit or hold services among the scattered units, such as batteries where men are spread all over the country in forties or fifties. All they can do is to visit the various field ambulances and hospital stations and infantry rest stations.

June, 1915.

For the last six nights out of seven I have been doing night work as well as day, four of them not getting back till 1.30 or 2 a.m. and one not till 4 a.m., and, of course, there is nothing ready to eat or drink and we have to turn to and cook anything

we want at dawn (last meal probably "brekker" the day before), then turn in, all standing on mother earth, generally on duty again 7 a.m. Yesterday morning I got in with a small party of six men of whom I had been in charge!!! wire laying and patrolling at 2.30 a.m., so "whacked" that we were constantly tumbling down and could hardly endure the weight of our rifles and apparatus. However, we got four good hours' sleep before battery duty next day, and for my part I slept for an hour to-day instead of washing during an off duty time, and apart from aching and being tousled am as right as a trivet, and unless we get an attack am looking forward to six hours' sleep to-night.

This night I am talking about we had rather a spree. We seven had to lay a wire to the infantry and other places, and during the day got all done that could be done out of sight of the enemies' lines, leaving the last mile—in actual view of their trenches—to be done at nightfall. The first spree was laying it up a short stretch of "corduroy" road about 200 yards, on which they lay and fire a machine gun every night to prevent us using it for ration parties, etc. It started with a few rifle shots—quite dark, of course—which we could afford to ignore, as they all seemed to be passing a foot or so above our heads; but about half-way up the road the

machine gun began as the flares lit up the road, and we had to fall flat and roll into a ditch for about twenty minutes, leaving our reel—about 3 ft. high—in the middle of the road. It doesn't sound heroic, but when on such a job you must get the job done at any cost, for the safety of the infantry depends upon the wires we lay from our guns to their trenches, as we are in action two minutes after their call for support, and to go on when a machine gun is firing means every man would be riddled in the first half minute, and hours before another party could carry on the job. Then came another awkward bit of about 800 yards parallel to the German trenches behind our own and in full view of the former, as they are on higher ground. This took a long while, as every flare that went up meant either "freezing" perfectly still or falling flat, and we had to cut 6 ft. poles in places to raise the wire on, and on one corner where we were all seven working on a white piece of road a flare went up and caught us and we were spotted. Luckily I thought of telling the men to move on directly it went out, because that corner was peppered by a machine gun for a quarter of an hour after, while we sat and chortled a few yards away. If the Germans are wily we can beat them at their own tricks. But that is a plan of theirs, to lay—in daytime—machine guns or rifles on fixed

tripods at visible bits of path, road, or breaks in hedges, so that at night they have only to press the trigger. This wire won't be unbroken more than two or three days, as whenever they see one through glasses they drop shells to smash it, knowing the vital importance of them. But as two of us have to patrol daily or nightly every wire of our own, we can get the most awkward one mended an hour or so after night-fall. At the end of this 800 yards we had to turn in towards our own trenches, but luckily were not observed, as a hedge and farm hid us 200 yards behind the trench we wanted, and this last bit two of us managed to trundle across at the run without being spotted, and the others followed in twos—the safest way. You can bet your respective boots we were glad to return by the more roundabout but less exciting way of a communication trench, and up to the present the blessed thing—the wire—is still intact, and the two men who are due to go to the infantry to-night are now patrolling it *en route*. I can tell you I was thumping glad to get *my* party! back without a casualty. One of the most distressing positions I can imagine is that—fully realized that night—of straining at arm's length on tip-toe, to get a clove-hitch knot of heavy wire on to a branch and to hear a bullet or two cracking into and *bursting* in the same tree. Evidence of my

own eyes, as well as ears, has shown the use of explosive, as well as expanding bullets, by the Germans.

As I have said before, "We don't get much money, but we do see life !" It would cheer each respective cockle of each of your respective hearts to hear how cheery everyone is in the trenches and on the guns and everywhere ; the infantry cheer and roar with laughter when a shell bursts without harming anyone, and everyone is so pally when we go to the trenches that we could leave our rations behind if we liked, as they are always willing to give us theirs and make us a can of tea, and "them artillery blokes" get on very well with the infantry, and so far we have been connected with and had to support eleven regiments, Regulars or Terriers. One of the most gorgeous and thrilling sounds, apart from *hard* artillery firing when you become dotty with noise, is being in the trenches when the frequent "Stand to" is given ; we, of course, take our part as infantryman for the time, one man on the telephone for four hours, and the other barging round with a rifle off and on for four hours at a time. When "Stand to" is given, all step up on to the little platform which raises us high enough to fire over the parapet, and then if followed by rapid fire a gorgeous rippling crash of rifle fire breaks out which goes on right and left, and woe

betide any of "them Germins as pops theer'eads over them parapits, they woon arf cop out!" I shall always have after this an undying admiration for the common or garden British Tommy, their unfailing cheerfulness, and acceptance of onerous and dangerous jobs as a matter of course, and the way they have stuck the constant bombardment without the help of a single inspiring victory to cheer them up. Of course they grouse at times, but never at the work, officers, or danger, only because this man or that man has not done the right thing for them at home, in Parliament, or elsewhere. And I reckon that if we in future see a soldier drunk or otherwise misbehaving, we shall do well to remember, before sitting in judgment on him, that if he doesn't hold his present appetites in order, he at any rate held his bit of parapet with jovial grimness against what is still odds of five to one. God knows how they stuck it through last winter; the odds then were eight to one and the conditions beyond power of word description, but of that "contemptible little army" few are left to tell the tale, and of these still fewer who are in possession of health and faculties to talk at all; it is a nightmare about which they seem to be trying to forget rather than talk about. No more now; am due to go on duty. Here's to the British infantryman!

CHAPTER IX

LIFE IN THE TRENCH

June 8th, 1915.

THE trench which was our home for six hours is a German one, its old front being now the back. It is about seven feet deep, and in order to fire or look about you step on to a raised wooden platform, which is just wide enough to enable a man to walk along, or for two to pass sideways, and at the back (also parapeted for high explosive shells) and underneath are the dug-outs. Ours was four feet long (for two men), four feet broad, and about eighteen inches to two feet high, and once laid down one's head touched the back of the dug-out and one's feet the opposite side of the trench, causing much tripping up for men passing and re-passing, as the dug-outs are every two or three yards and the trench in zigzags. At night with a candle in the earth at the back I found it best for reading to lie flat on my back and have a short stick on my chin with which I pressed the magazine against the

sandbag roof ; it was a fine idea, and the stick, about a foot long, wedged in finely ! In the night some Germans crept up near enough to throw some hand grenades into the next traverse, but did no damage beyond making everyone "stand to arms" and fire five rounds rapid into the dark ; this happened twice, but the next day we were treated to enfilading shell fire from high explosive shells, the first two of which fell in front, and beyond shaking us up did no damage, but the third was a direct burst in the next traverse, killing one man in a dug-out and blowing a heavy sandbag into his pal by him and putting him on the sick list, and slightly wounding two men, whom we were talking to as we squatted down in our traverse, one in the arm and the other in the neck. A piece of shell bumped up against my knee, but was spent and didn't even bruise, but I collared the bit while it was still hot and have kept it. After this we thought it time to crawl into the dug-outs, and there we stuck it for an hour while they blazed away, and we could hear the bits plugging into the sandbags ; then they shifted range and shelled another regiment.

These escapes are nothing compared with what the infantry have daily, but it was an interesting experience being in the very front trenches ; the infantry are unconcerned and whatever comes to

them is treated as a matter of course. The two of our signallers who are there to-day will have something to talk about, I expect, as the enemy have been shelling the same "register" all day on and off, but as they haven't rung us up to say they are hit out, we assume and hope they are all right. The getting out and getting in is a ticklish job if the enemy are firing much; it is a good two mile walk and the last mile is fairly swept by the rifle fire that overflies our parapets, unless you go all the way by a circuitous zig-zagging communicating trench that no one uses, as it takes an hour to get along its mile and a half or so of length. We came out last night with the water-fetching party and a stretcher party with the dead; luckily the Germs were quiet, and if it were not for the frequent flares, shattered farms and trees and appalling stench, it might be an evening's walk in the country in England across country, for we never heard a bullet. I took a turn helping to carry the man who had been killed in our trench, and never realized till then what an awful job the stretcher-bearers have, stumbling along over holey roads, over mounds and ditches, etc. We were a party of about fourteen strong, but were all "whacked" by the time we had got the poor beggar to headquarters; probably our men who are there to-day will do a similar job if they come away with the water

party. On the way out we have to pass through a farm now known as "Stinking Farm," as round it and another near by some of the fiercest fighting took place some time ago, the names of which battles and the regiments who took part therein you'll recognize when I am able to tell you. In the middle of the night we were in the trenches; the Germans shouted at us and we could hear them singing, and nightly raids go on in which they come and "pinch" our barbed wire and add to theirs, and we (that is, our infantry) re-pinch it back with more too; very often these little "working parties" get exposed by a flare and a machine gun is laid on them, but the dodge is when a flare goes up if you are too late to drop down flat you have to stand perfectly still and trust they'll take you for a bush or shadow.

June 8th, 1915.

2 a.m. has just struck and a cock has crowed, and now a terrific fusillade is going on, but not on our immediate front; shall be getting a report through the infantry wire soon, our support may be wanted. Yesterday I with another of our men was "standing to arms" in the firing trench of the infantry in front of us, as we were on

infantry duty, but we had no bayonets fixed like all the rest. It was a grim sight in the half twilight to see the bayonets all above the parapet and the men standing to fire or charge, but we only let off five rounds rapid each and then cleared off again to sleep in the dug-outs, leaving only the sentries in the traverses. In the daytime you can step on to the board that raises your head above the level of the seven foot parapet and gaze out on the German trenches from 100 yards to 430 yards away at that particular spot, only you must not stay there long, as it tempts their sentries and sharpshooters, but at night when flares are going up it is death to look over the top. Jack D. and the other signallers and I went out with a corporal along a short sap in the afternoon in front of this trench, then climbed out and crept along a hedge for fifty yards more beyond our barbed wire defences and about fifty yards in front of theirs, where we dropped into a Jack Johnson hole and had a look round. We were midway between the two firing trenches and about 100 yards from the German lines, but we were not spotted or fired at, so we did not fire, but it was with a rather creepy feeling that we (or rather *I*) crawled out of the Jack Johnson hole and had fifty yards of open country to crawl along on hands and knees before dropping into the sap trench.

Our khaki saved us from observation probably, unless their look-outs were slack, and the fun was well worth it. Coming out from the trenches last night I helped to carry a man out who had been killed a few yards from us by a shell. We had a mile of open ground to carry him and the water bottles across, with flares going up; but luckily they were quiet—and we had very few bullets over. After that we got into the tiny dug-outs, and there we had to stick over an hour's hard shelling from high explosive shells, the whole earth shaking at each burst and fragments plunking down all round. Then came their rifle fire; but all was quiet again by the time we had to leave at nightfall. Two others are there to-night, and judging by the row there has been they too have been through the mill. I have come to the conclusion that the artillery signaller at any rate has earned the portion of the badge that says "Ubique."

We go in the firing trenches, reserve trenches, observation stations, and back at our gun positions and wire patrols between the lot, and yet here we are still without a casualty and still rather surprised and certainly pleased each night, as each pair comes rolling in once more, back to the comparatively safe pair that are on the "Exchange" at the farm. The day after to-day (as it is 2.30 a.m.) D. and I will be

in the observing station, then wiring, patrolling, then infantry unless any special job crops up meantime.

We have had terrific heat lately, and to-day one man in the 3rd battery who was heliographing to us fainted from the heat, and another had sunstroke. We could not make out why the helio was stopped, as it was one and a half miles away and they couldn't be seen even with glasses, so you can imagine the temperature if a trained soldier faints from it. We never have tunics on now, and have lately been existing on half a bottle of water, as the cart comes daily and doesn't hold enough to fill all bottles. For washing we have to use some dirty pond water full of living animal and vegetable organisms, our basin being a biscuit tin. You would howl with laughter to see some of our makeshifts: braces made from telephone wire, the walls of our little outhouse—where the pigwash tub in the heat gets higher—adorned with pictures out of *Punch* and other illustrated papers stuck on the wall with marmalade !

The birds are yelling hard outside and a cock is crowing in Morse — - — —, which, as he runs it without an appreciable break, can be rendered, "Tat—/-—/—," or "Ka— - —/- —," the other possibilities being unpronounceable, "Tw—/- — —," and "Nm— - /— —." There was one at Broom-

field which S. amused the others by saying crowed "Y," and so it did. It went — - — — all in one, which is perhaps what this one is attempting, but his is a poor effort !

CHAPTER X

“ REST ”

June, 1915.

YOU were mistaken in thinking we were all this time in the rear. We have been bang on the fighting front and already qualified for two bars to our medal for actions in big scraps, and that accounts for all our signalling work being under fire and the attendance daily of two signallers in the firing trenches with the infantry. And no better friends could we have than the Regulars. Now for the last four days we have “nightly pitched our moving tents a day’s march nearer Home” or home, for each day’s war brings us nearer one or the other.

The last four days have been tremendous marches lasting till midnight and after, before the horses are picketed and fed in the new place—rain day and night and sleeping out in the open with ground sheet over us and blanket round us, officers in farms or chateaux! We have had to throw away all superfluous kit and luxuries, and have only just the bare change of

“ unders ” and washing tackle and food bag so as to save the horses—either outriders like myself or in the wagons. “ Pickwick ” still flourishing and carries me well and all my personal junk (little) and signalling junk (heaps).

Where we are now is a “ Rest ” camp, and don’t any of you be under any delusion as to what that means. It is like all other “ rest ” camps—hard driving work from 5 a.m. to midnight for the men, especially in mounted regiments. The only rest is that from actual firing and danger, which none of us want to come away from. It is two miles to the place where we have to water the horses every feeding time ! We are all frightfully fed up ; not weakening in our determination to do our best in the job or regretting what we have taken up—but fed up with the crass blindness in the past ; and fed up with spying double-faced Belgians, and other *unnecessary* matters here. We have, however, determined in this battery that they can break our backs with work and loss of sleep, food and water, but they’ll never break our hearts, and when we go into action on the new front, and may it come soon, we hope to show them that the much despised “ Saturday afternoon soldiers ” are as fit and game as any. It is a sign of official appreciation to be put in our new position, so some puffed-out old bigwigs are having to eat their

own words and command the men they laughed at in years gone by. Amongst the Regulars, men and non-coms., we have, however, always been well received, and as far as artillery is concerned they have been grateful for our support, the greatest wonder to them being the fact that the first supporting shell was sent by us two minutes after their telephone application arrived in the middle of the night, all being asleep but the guard and men on telephone duty.

About food, please don't think we are starved ; there is enough of it, though we are often short of water to drink, but one sickens of bread and jam and stew day after day for ten months. . . . The scrutiny of kits is severe now we are in the mobile first army. The most useful things to send are chocolate, potted meat, sardines (with key) ; the first is best of all, as we so often move off without food and get none for hours owing to time, or the food wagon getting lost in the dark, or jibbing horses, ditches, etc. Sometimes we pack up and saddle up just as we have sat down to a meal, and all has to be thrown away and buried, and we are out of the camp and on the road in half an hour, lines cleaned and ground swept, rubbish burned, pits filled up, etc.

The country here is lovely, wooded with oaks, elms and sweet-smelling limes, and undulating, unlike Belgium. All sorts of soldiers are here,

Indians, French, Singalese, etc. The latter yell as they march along, Yi yi, Hi yi, that in the distance sounds like the blood-curdling noise I heard once when our men were charging, a mixture of cheers, yells, shrieks and howls—a most uncanny noise.

CHAPTER XI

A CRICKET MATCH AT THE FRONT

SOMEWHERE the sun is shining, and at last, after months of rain and mud, it is shining "Somewhere in Belgium," consequently the young men's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of cricket. Two bats have been hatcheted, bill-hooked and jack-knifed out of willow trees to a fair representation of the oiled and spliced variety, and a ball—a hockey ball, by the way—is produced by some sportsman who has carried it in his kit since leaving England. But before going any further, your interest must be invited by an introduction to the players, and further satisfied by the result of the match. The players and onlookers were the whole of the 2nd Battery Glos. R.F.A., with the exception of the drivers, who are a mile or so in the rear with the horses.

The game was played about ten yards from where the guns nosed through the hedge and sent their "plenty souvenirs," as the peasants say, over to the Germans. The game in itself was as rough and ready in outfit and pitch as any urchin's match on a bottle-strewn tipping

ground, and the only noteworthy feature was the unfinished score by Mr. J., who did his level best to hit A and B guns out of action by his boundaries, and made 99 not out.

The grand stand (prone position on the turf) was occupied by all who were free from duty for the time.

Its chief interest beyond that of recreation was towards the end of the game, when the order "Action" came through the telephone, and both opposing teams and spectators raced one another to the guns, and in fifteen seconds from the order being shouted from the telephone the 2nd battery were in action with as much keen enjoyment in the work as they displayed in the game. After one or two ranging shots had been fired, a German plane buzzed up overhead to try and find out where the fire came from, so we "froze" in our well-concealed position and watched it being chased by a British plane which fired at it. British and German anti-aircraft guns also joined in the fun, and a lively aerial fight went on for about ten minutes, white puffs of smoke from the bursting shells showing all round both machines, until at last the German turned tail and fled back to its own lines. We, in the meantime, stayed round the guns, as we were screened from above by bushes, any spare men going into the dug-outs, as it is

very nearly as important to guard our gun positions from German observation as it is to suppress news of regimental achievements from the British public, to whom a regiment is lost as soon as it leaves England. The Germans, however, know quite enough of the general direction and range of our fire to bombard us daily, and often nightly, with searching shells.

On the disappearance of the enemy plane we opened fire again on their trenches with great effect, according to the results telephoned from our observing station.

This little incident occurred some days ago, and has been repeated daily, minus the cricket, for we have been more or less continually in action since the fifth day after our arrival in France, though fortunately without any casualty so far, owing to our excellent hidden position. Escapes, however, are frequent, and very narrow at times.

The country is at its best now ; a distant view of two small towns—one in German hands and the other immediately behind our trenches—is lovely ; the red tiles of such houses as still have a roof, the deep blue sky, the green trees and green and brown earth, with huge patches of yellow turnip flower, forming a kaleidoscopic landscape ; but a closer inspection of these little towns and villages is a horror that will haunt all

who see them to the end of their lives. Towerless churches, streets pock-marked by heavy shell fire into craters that would hide a dozen men. Here is to be seen a disembowelled house, with carpeted floor bared to the sky, there a roof resting on chipped walls, with nothing underneath it but a mass of crushed bricks and household furniture—not a whole house or a living soul to be seen; everywhere one turns there are shell-rent buildings, roofs shattered and twisted into every conceivable shape, with jagged rafters pointing up into the heavens, as witnesses to God of the havoc around, which is one of the brands burnt by a cultured Christian Power into the face of a little brother nation. Let us hope that those at home will come forward at last, after nine months' cogitation, to help us carry out our determination that the latest German occupation of Belgium shall be the last, and that a similar fate shall not overtake our own homes by the same hand.

CHAPTER XII

THE REAL THING

August 1st, 1915.

WE are in action again in a very hot corner, but in terrifically strong dug-outs with five or six layers of tree trunks above our heads and six feet below the surface ; the guns also are sunk a foot or two with very strong side and similar roofs over them. But the position of all the batteries (which said positions we took over from the French last night) are all known and ranged by the Germans, they say, and are heavily shelled, as indeed the state of the ground shows, though to-day we have only had about sixty near us. Imagine a huge plain, more or less flat, about five to eight miles across each way, a sandy plain that reminds me in different aspects of Towyn flats, Salisbury Plain, and Blackdown, a vast expanse of sand and clay with remains here and there of last year's clover and root crops and for the rest knee deep in this year's thistles, "switch," and all sorts of lovely wild flowers. So once more we are in the artillery duel department, the only men of each battery

in position being the battery commander for the day, the sergeant-major, sergeants and actual gun detachments, and eight of us signallers, the spare gunners and others being with the drivers in the wagon line about five kilos in rear. We signallers took over the position under an officer yesterday at midday, the French remaining with us till night, when the rest came up with the guns, drivers returning to the wagon line with limbers and horses. I had the honour of laying and firing a 75 mm. gun of which you have read so much, and had some jolly chats with the men, as "*je parle français un petit peu.*"

The dug-outs are rather dirty, as are most French positions we take over, and there is just room for six men to sleep and to work the switch-board and instruments. The outlook is gorgeous, and judging from to-night we are going to have some lovely sky effects, having such a large view, only bounded on the horizon all round by small villages in woods. The wind and open air are lovely, and if you don't look at your frowsy khaki or at the guns you could imagine yourself getting a sea breeze on the Towyn sand dunes! Imagination has to be drawn upon to a huge extent in war time in order to forget surroundings and feelings. There is not the remotest trace of water nearer than the village twelve miles in

rear, and we have to drink *and* wash out of one water bottle full that we get when the water cart comes up at nights, so we shall have to roll in the grass for a wash ! Our observing station is in a hefty trench that runs parallel to our position about 500 yards in front. The dug-outs there are twelve feet below the surface and smell very poor after eleven months' French occupation, but their environs are—like most of France that we have been through—lovely. The trench takes the line of a road, and as you walk along your head is on a level with what was the bottom of the ditch at the roadside, the bank being one mass of wild flowers, the prevailing colours suggesting to the fanciful an irregular series of Allied flags, from the clumps of red poppy, white meadowsweet and blue harebells. Poke your head over the thrown-out soil on the other side of the road, and it is a welter of rusty bins, old respirators, broken bits of equipment and a second-hand wardrobe of French garments in all stages of decay. During an "off" time I trudged along this trench for a mile to what is left of a village on our left front, which we drove out of the other day; every wall chipped and cracked in a thousand places with bullets and shrapnel, all houses loop-holed, and the trench I was in took me bang through a house, through the dining-room and kitchen, and on a level with my head was the

dresser with the earth thrown up all round and on it. I felt quite a qualified looter when I scrambled out of the trench and "wangled" a pocketful of apples from the orchard. Must go on duty now. All quiet at present, though we tickled them up with our new guns to-day !

August 7th (I think), 1915.

Yesterday came the terribly sad news of C. P.'s death in action. I feel awfully sorry for Mrs. P. and H., in a manner one can't express in words and when one is amongst it all. Words seem to lose all their power of expression before these unparalleled conditions. The loss of officers in that Gallipoli Peninsula has been terrific in those attacks of sheer weight of numbers. I have lately, too, had so many old school and other pals in B. killed, mostly on the front we occupy, as they are in the same division.

Well, we are in action again pretty heavily, as the French positions on an open plain (though in dug-outs) are well-known in range to the Germans and they shell us heavily daily with high explosive, and we are so close that the sound or scream of the shell, and its burst, are almost simultaneous, so that when they begin and we are all out in the open there is no chance of dodging below. They have knocked our dug-outs about a bit, blown through the bottom of our water

tank, smashed the officers' frying pan and broken *all* our carefully laid wires *four days running*, giving us endless work, though rather exciting work too, and we enjoy the feeling of diddling the enemy by getting into communication again with brigade infantry and other headquarters and batteries.

Just now I am forward in the trenches with the W. regiments, for four days, after which two more of our signallers come for four days. I am here till Tuesday night. We are attached as artillery signal service men, two from each battery going into the trenches covered by the zone of their fire, four hours off and four on daily day and night for four days; it is a bit of a strain for two men. At present I am off duty and they are shelling us here heavily with H.E. gas shells—awful choking chlorine stink, but not bad enough for the smoke-helmet, which is simply a flannel helmet with talc eye-holes and sprayed with a chemical. We look like Inquisition devils when in them. Where I am now we are quite—as it were—safe from the shell fragments unless they pitch down the steps, the bottom one of which I am sitting on. This is a German trench captured a few weeks ago, and shows the sort of thing we have to smash up and conquer; the trench, of course, is as usual, the water and mud being kept *in* it and from drowning out the dug-outs by a high

wooden step at top of each one. The latter go down fifteen nine-inch steps, and are at frequent intervals all along the trenches; so here we are twelve feet below the surface and six feet of earth and trunks above that, with walls, roof, etc., made of three-inch planking, so that each dug-out reminds me of nothing so much as the descent into the Underground or Twopenny Tube while the workmen were still excavating. No fires allowed, therefore nothing to drink but cold water, and of that, one water bottle per day per man and a two-mile tramp through the communication trenches to refill at night. No water for washing; mud always ankle deep in long stretches of anything from one to 500 yards, the water is just above knee deep; trenches narrow, floor thereof holey and slippery; so you can imagine what we look like. As I was in our forward observing station (also a trench) before coming here, and it is in the same condition, I haven't had dry legs day or night for five days; but all are the same, only I'm just giving my experiences. Our clothes, hair and hands are grimed and caked with mud, or rather clay, for it is all clay here. Our gun position is not many yards behind the forward trench, but between the latter and this infantry firing trench (though probably ten minutes' walk if a road ran as the crow flies from one to the other), is a *three-mile*

trench tramp, as, of course, the trench has to twist and turn to escape the various enfiladings and enemy saps, and then any given frontage of firing trench is never a straight line, probably like this :



Any actually straight piece such as this * would be thus :



to give cover from enfilade. Then sometimes we capture 150 yards length of enemy trench in front ; then a sap has to be driven back at either end of the captured bit to the old trench in the rear and the enemy ends blocked up, and so it goes on. The other night our battery fired high explosive at a "working party" of Germans in a sap that was being worked close towards our trench ; we broke up the meeting for them and smashed the sap-head into a clay ruin, and it is doubtful if any escaped alive. Yesterday our wire from this infantry headquarters back to the battery was smashed by a shell. I ran along

to mend it ; on climbing out of the communication trench where the break was I had to work the job close against where a dead German was, just lightly covered with soil but feet sticking out ; but it has long been a common sight, and sometimes the earth even gets all washed by rain or blown away by shell. All around was debris, French and German equipment, clothing, tools, etc., and burial places—one can't say graves. I was fortunate with the mending, though the same place was spattered by a distant high explosive shell just after I had jumped into the trench again, luckily without breaking the wire. I was hidden from view of the near enemy's firing trenches by the irregular ground, luckily, otherwise their rifles might have made it a warmer job. Nothing makes you feel madder than being deliberately fired at when doing a job that has to be done slowly and carefully, such as insulating the wire after baring the cable and joining the ends. A man who has been fouled at footer has the same feeling.

To-day one of us—during his off four hours—will have to go back to the battery to draw rations again, and the other during his time will draw water, as we don't draw from the regiment we are attached to for the time being. Our triumphal entry into the trenches the night before last played havoc with yesterday's and to-day's

rations in a sack on shoulder ! The one loaf was a wet mass mostly muddy, from constant fallings upon and wild lashings of the sack to preserve balance! but we have been able to live the two days on one or two of the less dirty lumps of it dried by a candle. Cheese started in a lump, but we now peel it off the bully tins, and one wedge has got driven into a little tin that held our tea; just as well, as we cannot boil water to have the tea, and to see usable tea-leaves without being able to use them would be pure aggravation. *Compris?* The infantry, poor beggars, are often worse off, though; yesterday those here had only one tin of jam to every *seventeen* men, instead of one between four. That—considering there is no such thing as butter, and jam is the only thing besides cheese that one really eats, as no one can stand bully beef now—I thought was a real hardship ! But all round the infantry get it worse than we do; the only pull they have over us is that they move by day and we always by night. A lot of them have cut their trousers off just above the knee and go about in boots and socks under that arrangement of clothing ! If the trenches are as bad as this now after four weeks' rain, heaven help us in the “swellings of Jordan” or when the winter comes on. And still—after seeing men hit out here and there and seeing the poor beggars

of infantry enduring these conditions—we read in the paper, “There is nothing doing on the Western front.” But although it seems as if we are doing nothing, we are never at rest. Infantry, cavalry, sappers, artillerymen, are always digging, draining, making or mending dug-outs, trenches, drains, gun positions, dummy trenches and positions, laying wires and taking them up again and re-laying elsewhere, carrying materials and food about, all of them doing each others’ jobs. Infantry making an observing station for artillery, artillery laying or burying perhaps a wire for the infantry or digging a trench for them. Yet through it all we fire a good deal, though the infantry don’t ; it is mostly artillery here. *Until* the great move, and then if one survivor in five returns with his hearing and senses intact I shall be surprised. I was deaf for two days after St. Eloi and Hill 60, and several of our men are now “resting” with deafness at the horse lines. But the most distressing and aggravating work is that which is needless, that you know will have to be done next day, or that is due (and you know it) to some idiot officer’s mistake, *e.g.*, our forced march on B. The other night the Adjutant wanted to speak to the Colonel on some matter about 11 p.m. The Colonel, of course, is in billets in a village a mile behind our gun position, to which we had had no orders to lay a wire (and

woe betide you if you do a thing, however useful or sensible, without orders). The Adjutant, after making a suitable row about it (having forgotten the matter himself!) turned four of us out to do it there and then. A six-man job really, as a reel of one mile of thick cable such as we have to use here is almost too heavy for two to hold while two more reel off and fix up. We got up to the Colonel's billet 2.30 a.m. He said it was worse than useless, as he never wished to have a wire, and next day we heard all officers' billets were being removed to another village about same distance in rear on our left! That's the sort of thing that makes you wish you were an officer, knowing, as many of our men do, that they have the brains to think out courses of action before taking them. We have some out here straight from school, unused to men or being amongst men, certainly unused to commanding and thinking for and about their men, good as far as their technical knowledge and the mathematics of gunnery and other branches, etc., takes them, but thoughtless and irresponsible to the last degree and most useful experience of all lacking, that gained by bargaining about for a few years among all sorts and conditions of men. The O.T.C. is a vast and ghastly mistake; it teaches schoolboys to think—though acting as privates, etc.—they are already born to rule and needn't

think of anything but the time when they leave their cadetships to become lieutenants. I may have H.'s young cousin commanding me next year, whom we looked after as a schoolboy in our house last year!! The worst of it is tremendous difficulties are in the way of a man once in the firing line taking a commission. No colonel wishes to lose his men, who, after all, do the fighting and lay the guns for him. Had I known I would have spent my spare evenings when in training at C. in polishing up my trigonometry, and certainly never left England without a commission. Out here it needs strong political pressure to get discharge for leave to return to England and work up commission unless you are in a regiment of "class," "Queen's Westminsters," "London Scottish," "Artist Rifles," and the like. Yet there is better material for officers amongst the hundreds of gentlemen out here as privates, troopers, gunners, and sappers who have had actual fighting than the O.T.C. could raise from the public schools in 100 years. I am not grouching, but we are all of the same opinion, and it relieves matters to let loose one's opinions sometimes, especially when living under pressure of severe discipline.

I am afraid it will go very ill with the Germans once we do advance; they will have no mercy from the armies that are so fed up with the state

of affairs that the pigheaded arrogance of the Germans has brought about. Someone has told me C. is out here. What division is he in? I wonder if we shall ever meet! Whatever will you do without us! No more now; I must get on duty after splitting a tin of borrowed Maconochie with F., who is now on duty.

August 21st, 1915.

I am afraid lately my letters have been few and far between, but now we are having quite a slack time sitting tight and doing nothing, having moved our position to a very safe set of gun emplacements which the enemy cannot find by plane or shell. So we are rather in the way of enjoying a holiday, as it has been gorgeous weather and the country round looking fine. . . .

We have now completed our dug-outs, and the signallers are about five minutes' walk to right-rear of the guns, two men in each. F., an Oxford undergrad., and myself have one, very small but awfully cosy, just room for two of us to lie down and not quite to stand up; but I have put a fireplace in it, as we are allowed to have covered fires at night, when smoke can't be seen, and we brew ourselves stews and stew ourselves brews on it. In a clay niche in the wall, lined with paper, I have my library of magazines and papers H. sent me, and all sorts and con-

ditions of garments hang on the walls, including a *Punch* cartoon or two. F. has to put the fire out before he lies down, otherwise—his head being almost in the ash-place—hot bits of wood would singe his already thinned locks. He is working—or was—for a professorship in Maths. So you see many an agile brain beats under khaki putties! . . .

I went into the village to-day about a mile in rear and astonished myself by the ease with which I can converse with the natives and understand them, and they are as pleased as a dog with ten tails when they find a soldier who can understand them as well as talk *to* them, and needless to say not a shred of what I learned at school has been of the remotest use, for so far I haven't had occasion to ask the keeper of a general store if she "has the pen of the gardener's aunt." If I had I would bet a gunner's pay she would answer, "No, but I have some food of the grandchild of my husband's brother." And how could one keep up an *entente cordiale* on that sort of thing?

In the trenches again.

August 24th, 1915.

There are two things that militate against appetite, viz.—not to put too fine a point upon it—

stinks. What with the terrible number of dead about here and the appalling smell of chlorate of lime—supposed to deodorise the other—the food of twelve months' unbroken bully, bread, and jam, palls, and you cannot eat at regular intervals, but it is good to have something to chump just when you like and when you can get away from smells. The two aforementioned dodge one another along every trench, neither overcoming the other, but both not so much offending the nose as gripping you in the midriff with a horrible continuous nausea. I am now sitting upon the top of our telephone dug-out in the trenches for air, but amply protected by the parapet in front, into which bullets keep cracking like the crack of a rifle, while others buzz, whine or flick over the top according to whether they are spent, ricochets or directs. I will try and describe these trenches, so different from, yet so alike to those before Messines; but before that, will explain why I am here. The signallers have to spend four days in the trenches, four days back with the battery as signallers, three in the forward observing trench and one with the battery as gunners to keep our hand in; so that the twelve men keep on changing with one another in groups of three every four days.

These are captured German trenches, the old

front of course being now the back. The parapets, unlike the neat ones of sandbags at Messines, are just heaped-up earth out of which stick everywhere straps, pieces of clothing, equipment, cartridges, tins, wood, smashed wire and here and there a bit of rifle, and all round (when one can climb out on the top on a misty dawn unseen) are bodies lying just as they fell with the earth heaped over them a few inches in depth, sometimes a boot, hand or other part exposed, with smashed barbed wire everywhere except in front, where, of course, it is intact, rigid and very formidable. (*Note*.—A shell burst over a trench to the right, occupied by some Scotch at least 700 yards away, and a piece of shell has just hit the ground a couple of yards off with an awful whang. I consider myself very lucky, as twice before Messines I was hit by high explosive on the hand and knee, but only hard enough to raise bruises, while at the same time a man was killed and two wounded within ten yards of me.) Well, to continue: Along both sides of the trench are pegged with staples, or forked sticks, wires, infantry and artillery, some of the latter shooting away across the open and only patrollable by night. Twenty wires make a dive into this infantry headquarter dug-out. One is ours—hence us! In the front of the parapet are dug sort of shelves variously marked—bombs,

verey lights, rockets, etc. At the corner of each transverse stands a sentry always on duty and occasionally firing through a loophole or over the top. The rest only "stand to" and fire at certain times, or when attacks are on. Orderlies, sergeants, corporals, officers push their way up and down here and there on various jobs; but everything gravitates to the signallers' dug-out, where messages, reports, inquiries and commands are constantly being received and sent, so that we hear most interesting things. Most of it we have to buzz in Morse code, not speak, as to have four infantry and two or three artillery operators all speaking confidential or secret messages together would be pandemonium, and there would be a knot of listeners at the top. A signaller, whether in the ranks or N.C.O., has authority to place under arrest anyone listening to or overlooking a message, whoever he may be.

So far we have been lucky with this wire since coming in yesterday. The last time I was on at the battery three days ago the infantry wire was smashed by shell fire four times in one six hours, and I had to patrol it half-way, the signaller in infantry coming out to meet me, and in each case it was near about the middle, so that each of us had to go till we met. Sometimes it is only a yard or two from either end, and only takes five minutes to mend. Each station rings

up, or rather buzzes up by Morse calls, every other station it is in communication with every quarter of an hour, so you can soon tell if your wire is intact.

Note.—I have just heard that two were killed and three wounded by the burst that I mentioned earlier. This afternoon, being off for four hours, I went back to the battery to get any letters, and was rewarded by three and a paper. Much "bon for the soldats." It is a two-mile zigzag curly walk through the trench and then another mile to the battery, though, of course, as the crow flies, it is not farther than from A. to the beach at Eastbourne (I must not say what range, otherwise the Germans would know it exactly). On the way back I lay down and read them. It was such a whiff—almost environment of home to me, and as good as a tonic to read A.'s description of C.'s and M.'s tour through and all over Warwick, Kenilworth, Stratford and Evesham, the scenes of so many of my jolly bike trips and photographings. I lay on the ground looking at the sky and imagined I had just got off my bike by Kenilworth Castle. The sky being the one part of the visible universe I can look at without being reminded of the war. The result was as good as a holiday, and I feel quite bucked and able to finish the war on my own. Then the sky became uninspiring, for with

a distant swish and a bang, shrapnel began bursting over a "working party" about half a mile off. A flash of white flame fifty feet up, a white puff of smoke, and a black-green one that gradually mixed, and a hurried scattering of ant-like figures beneath. For myself, I was quite safe, being only a single (though married) figure and probably unobserved altogether, though frequently one gets "sharpshotted" at by watchful German sentries. As a retaliation a 100 lb. howitzer shell or two was fired by a howitzer battery about half a mile to a mile in rear of our guns, the shell tearing overhead with the sound of a trolley running down a jetty. The only way I can make you realize the sound of the six-inch howitzer being fired is to get you to put your head into a large empty tin jug and shout "TOOMBB" as loudly and sepulchrally as possible; that will give you some idea of the ear-thumping bang such a gun gives at half-mile distance.

To-day—that is, since this evening—we have had some fun. The Germans have been driving a sap towards us. We have watched the fresh earth growing nearer and nearer, the flash of spades every now and then, and let them work as far as possible for safety, just to encourage the beggars. And then early this evening the 2nd battery got the angle and range: first shell 100 yards over, just to prevent them running back

to their fire trench; second shell just about over the end of the sap; then a high explosive, to burst on percussion, from us, and one from the heavy battery behind us just to smash in all the work they had done. That's all; but to-night we have two of our guns laid on the saphead again, and the infantry listening post will be out; if there are signs of work being continued, word will come to me on the 'phone, the listening post will come in, and it will fall to my lot to give the word "action" down the wire; thirty seconds after, a shell will burst over or on the saphead, and the Germans will get very fed up and shell our trenches and batteries viciously all the next day. This has often happened, and we remain silent, and then after they have spat out their anger and think they have blown away every gun on the face of the earth we give them a battery salvo, as do other batteries, just one shell fired from each of the four guns at once, to show them we are still all alive and smiling; it is a form of humour that irritates them tremendously.

11.51 p.m. (continued). Funnily enough I have just given the order for two rounds to be fired and they have just gone off and a beetle has dropped on my head, but I can't guarantee that there is any connection between the two. I mentioned in my last letter that leave was being

allowed to this division at the rate of one man per battery or company per week—that is, we reckoned that the whole battery would have had their leave within just three years; nevertheless it was to go by “drawing,” and the chance was about 1 in 800 that I got mine. Now once more, for the twentieth time since last August, “Leave is stopped,” and all the aortic regurgitation due to excitement of contemplating leave, even in such minute chances, has been wasted; life is once more a blank, and the weight of the war with its dragging and waiting clogs one’s spirits as the collapse of a wet tent does one’s body! Now there are rumours of another shift from this position, but where and when rumour doesn’t say. But don’t let that cause anyone who was going to write (or send a parcel) to refrain from doing so, as letters and parcels always follow up behind, and both are so welcome on the move and when settling down before rations get fixed up. Talking of rations (and I am afraid I have talked a great deal of them lately), it is a singular coincidence that of our bread and jam, the staple diet, in fact practically the only diet just now besides bread and biscuit, the jam part should be black currant, the one jam I loathe heartily, though a luxury to most of the others after T.’s plum and apple varied only by T.’s apple and plum.

Of course when we go into reserve, as we did for a month at Ferfay and Thievres, we get meat in abundance—as our drivers in the waggon line do now—also corn and wine and oil, the former for the horses and the latter for the harness and appointments. The wine we can purchase or drink only between 11.30 “ac emma” (a.m.) and 1.30 “pip emma” (midday), and 6—7 “pip emma” (at night), when the *estaminets*, *cabarets*, *debits de boissons*, etc., are open. They charge 2½d. for a small glass of *vin blanc*, *vin rouge* or citron. I generally have a mixture much resembling weak cider of “vang blong et ceetrong” together, but the nearest *estaminet* is one and half miles behind our battery, so it is a rare treat.

I am afraid I go rambling on with a lot of drivel, but some things are so rummy out here that when I have time I like to get 'em off my chest to keep me from busting with laughter. Like poor Balbus Agricola of the Latin exercise who “Rupto Corpore Jacet,” according to Virgil! It is a penny scream to go into an *épicerie* and listen to “Tommy” buying his groceries. I usually perhaps chaff the woman a bit and give her a few sentences of my best French in the vain hope that she'll think I know what the prices of things really ought to be, and will consequently take a franc or so off the price of a small

tin of fruit ; but it is never any use, and I have to pay two francs for a 10½d. tin of fruit and one franc for a 3½d. tin of sardines. A “Tommy” hearing me babbling wildly in what he takes to be French, first looks at me to see if he should salute, and then probably says :

“’Ere choom, watter they call them there things in them tins ?” Of course I generally do the whole deal for him, but often I don’t, so as to enjoy an inward chortle on hearing him—prompted by myself—ask for “serrisses ong boyt” (*cerises en boite*) or “botool der vynn-blong” or even “vin blank” ! Sometimes he will come in with a worried but defiant look on his face and ask in a loud tone, “Pang ?”—“Unn loaf, yer know, maddermessel,” at the same time probably wishing he could make a noise like a piece of bread for her behoof. The answer is generally the loaf and a murmured “Quatre vingt, m’sieu.” “What the blank, blank, does she mean by that ?” “’Ere, take it outer this, ma cherry. Blimey, they’ll diddle yer any road”—addressing me and the woman alternately.

It is a funny thing that the shopkeepers never talk of centimes, but always of sous. They say a thing is “soixante-quinze” but “quinze sous,” both of course meaning the same.

September 17th, 18th, and 19th, 1915.

You are all just beginning to think about harvest festivals, of which we are vividly reminded by the millions of apples and pears rotting on the trees and the ground—for this is the orchard district, and we eat a good many of the apples, though most trees are small cider apples, and the pears are still green. Probably the rotting fruit is one reason why we have so many “brass” flies, *i.e.*, big green flies of the bluebottle size, which shine like brass when the sun is on them, but they kill well and are easy to “strafe.” We shall be able to join you in at any rate one hymn—altered to fit circumstances: “We plough the fields and scatter the good—shells—on the ground.”

I can hardly imagine that there was ever a time when I was able to sleep through a whole night and not run the risk of imprisonment or death for not going on duty at a certain hour. And there are times when I wonder whether I shall ever be a free citizen again, able to wash daily and as often daily as I like—at present the highest ambition a soldier is capable of feeling ! We have a well not far from our billet—at which we spend one night out of three, in turn ; the well is 200 feet deep, at the bottom of which France keeps some rather dirty, malodorous water. It is understood that the man who draws

a bucket of same—ten minutes' hard work—is entitled to the first wash in it.

You'd like to hear about our billet. It is a small cottage in an orchard with the typical ladder up from the hall into the garret where, according to French and Belgian custom, all disused clothes, old books, stores of corn and rice, articles of house hold and agricultural furniture and anything else in the house that is frowsy, decrepit or broken is stored, and where the cats and the rats struggle for supremacy. The southern end of the roof is sheared off by a shell, and there is only one pane in the windows and a few tiles on the roof, most of the woodwork and the windows being "concussed" out as well as the glass, and the wall against which I sleep is slit from top to bottom at each of two corners and leans drunkenly outwards. The brick floors, however, are intact, and, in spite of the slight coating of deceased beetle that won't brush away, forms a dry if springless bed. There is a shell hole in the garden which saved us the trouble of digging a rubbish and tin pit.

To-day I am sitting in the orchard writing this, and the Germans are getting busy. To get an idea of the effect, sit in our orchard at T., and imagine first a shell bursting on the lawn, another in the air over the stables, with the bits dropping all round beyond one, another on the house

and in the duck pond. There! that last was a close one, about twenty yards away; it has brought down a pear tree, but it is really safer outdoors than in. I would rather risk being hit by a piece of shell than crushed in a building. They are putting us through it to-day (and yesterday). One of our men was hit above the knee yesterday. Lucky beggar, that will mean England for certain. Now ours are replying—several batteries of them; the artillery duel department is in full swing—wish I were at the guns to-day—shall be after 8 p.m. to-night.

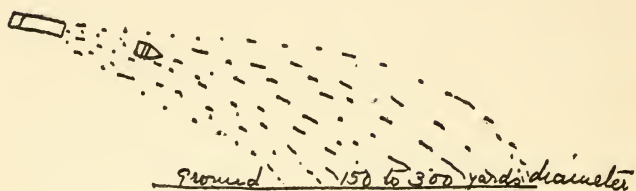
Yesterday I was at the observing station, and on the way there saw two men hit out by a high burst, one in the face and the other from behind in the shoulder blade; they were draining our forward observing trench with a party on fatigue. We had a heavy shelling yesterday all day, to which we replied in kind towards afternoon. They shelled our observing station unmercifully with the high velocity shells (whizz-bangs), which explode just as you hear the swish of their approach; there is no getting out of the way or falling flat possible, but we all got in the dug-out and observed the spasms of shelling, thus spotting another hostile battery. All day heavy howitzer shells from miles behind the German lines were rumbling overhead, falling on or near the villages, batteries, etc., all over the plain, with tremendous

explosions as regular as a services of buses, and the quick swishing scream of their field guns, mostly falling on our trenches or to rear near batteries. If the scream, which you can hear for about three seconds before the burst, approaches to a sort of shriek you know it is going to burst very near, and there is just time to fall flat to escape the air pressure; you can do nothing to escape bits if they come your way, so it's no use trying. We have had more narrow shaves lately than all the previous months. Yesterday F. got up to go into the observing dug-out and a jagged piece of shell bunged into the earth just where he had been sitting a few seconds before; we dug it out, a piece as big as one's palm. Then about 4 p.m. we replied for a frontage and rearage! of about a mile, field guns in front, howitzers in rear, and heavies behind that. The 2nd battery was not in that "strafing." I think altogether yesterday we (the 2nd) only fired ten rounds, but batteries on the British front are so thick on the ground that you trip over them as you walk—in a manner of speaking.

Now they ("them Germins") have begun again this morning and are going for this poor village in the manner described before. They have left this immediate neighbourhood and are bursting now mostly round the British cemetery

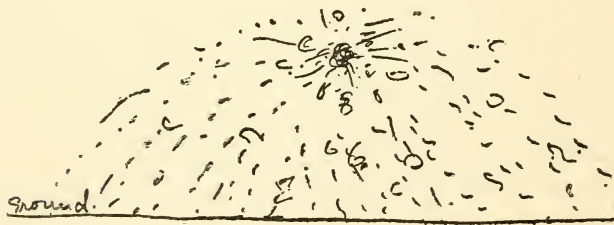
about 150 yards off and at the front of the village where the trenches begin about 400 yards in the other direction.

Shrapnel bursts thus :



The head or "fuse" of brass or aluminium flies off and the bullets, 235 of them, spread forwards as above, the shell *usually* falling whole, sometimes splitting.

High explosive bursts thus :



Area of 700—800 yards over which bits spread.

In this case the shell is thicker, and there are (except in the case of high explosive shrapnel) no shrapnel bullets in it, but the shell itself

bursts into pieces mostly averaging size of a penny, but one to two inches thick and jagged, and they spread *backwards* and sideways as well as forwards—an important matter in shelling trenches, buildings, etc. High explosive bursting “on percussion” moves the landscape, trees, houses, and anything that is in the way. Our field guns use both sorts of shell both as “time” and “percussion”; so, of course, do other nations.

A few minutes’ walk away, on the wall of our Brigade office—another cottage—is the nasty mark where a shell lifted someone against the wall of the cottage about ten feet up. Another yesterday burst five yards in front of the Brigade office, bent the windows and nearly removed the Doctor and the Adjutant, not to mention two or three brigade signallers. The two former are two topping men, such gentlemen, and they treat the men so decently. The former I have only spoken to on rare occasions; when he “wangled” me through last September, when I was inoculated, and now when he got me through the medical examination for a commission. I enclose a letter written to the paper which shows the only difficulty I am up against (together with several other men who have handed in their “Comm.” papers to the Colonel). So few seem to understand the situation out here. However much a man is cultured and however well-

educated and well connected, if he is a private or a gunner he is under the same discipline and receives the same treatment as a ticket-of-leave man recruited off the streets. To begin with, you must understand we are not allowed to *speak* to an officer at all unless spoken to, or brought before him by a N.C.O. So I went through the whole gamut. I got permission from my sergeant to apply for a commission; he took me before my section commander, Lieut. E., with whom I had a talk over it, and, finally, I got his permission to be taken to the Colonel commanding the 2nd battery, a sergeant taking me. And of that interview more anon. The Battery Commander has no say in the matter beyond recommending me to the Brigade Commander, Colonel —— (who commands 1st, 2nd and 3rd batteries and ammunition column). He alone signs the forms finally—after seeing me—and he alone recommends me to General —— to be seen in turn by him, the latter being the Commander R. A. for this Division. . . .

We twelve signallers from to-day have three on the sick list, so will have to work our various shifts of duty in couples instead of threes. Leave is stopped again, so my one chance in 145 of being drawn as the lucky man to go on leave for five days has faded away again; about five, I think, have been in this battery, so the chance is

1/140!! when leave does start. I may possibly be the last name drawn and come home 140 weeks after leave next commences.

September 25th, 1915.

We are as happy as sandboys now that the days of inactivity are over, *i.e.*, as regards the possibility of moving forward. I am in the trenches observing for four days now, and we are having a fine time, terrific artillery fighting going on, and magnificent results. Our ears are ringing and we can only shout at one another and Morse down the telephone; voices can't be heard.

F., Lieut. T., and I had *the* escape of our lives. We were in the front line trenches, in a dug-out facing the Germans' barbed wire, observing and telephoning the results of our fire. It was not long before the Germans spotted the small loop-hole, and knowing its use, shelled us heavily for half an hour. About twenty-five fell and burst about six feet behind, on and over the rear of the trench, about twenty burst in front; but our dug-out was all ways three sandbags thick, and only earth came flying through the loophole and through our back entrance. T. casually said, "I'm going to clear out of this, as they will be sure to get a direct hit, and then we can't observe." So we all three scrambled out of the trench,

which is only three feet wide at the top and one foot at the bottom, and six inches deep in mud after *one* day's rain. We had not straightened our backs from crawling out before the next shell hit full on the sandbags at the side of the observing hole. The whole front smashed in, and the fuse (the brass cap of the shell, about 2 lbs. weight) drove through the back three sandbags as well and fell into the trench just behind us, one foot behind where I was standing messing about with the telephone wire ; we were covered all over with an inch of earth—eyes, ears, neck, all filled with it. T. was the last man looking through the loop-hole in the dug-out ; had he stayed one minute more the fuse would have caught him just about neck level and swept his head off and ours behind him, as there is only just room for the three to squash in, the first looking out, the second behind him, the third leaning against the back or standing in the tiny doorway, room being scarce when every dug-out has to be made so strongly. I am writing to-day about fifty yards from the same spot in a dug-out. T. and F. are observing, and I relieve the latter in one hour. They have found a new place to observe, as the last was evidently “marked” and too unsteady to rebuild to use. The whole earth is shaking with explosions, as the Germans are shelling our barbed wire front trenches and

communicating trenches with great ferocity, and walking about unless on duty is unwise. The trench two yards outside my door is in a terrible state from the numbers of wounded that have been carried through, and if you did not know where to find the communicating trench out of the firing line, you could follow the trail of red smears and splashes, now gradually washing away with the insistent rain. The trenches have to be so narrow and tortuous that stretchers cannot possibly be carried through them, so small seats are used with pairs of handles each end to carry men out in a sitting position, which some don't survive, I fear.

Our batteries for the past few days have been pounded heavily, with some casualties. You can understand why our telephone wires are so frequently cut, and require such frequent patrolling and mending; wires are laid direct from battery to fire trench across the open by night, and duplicates are laid and pegged into the sides of the trenches, and the shells fall in and on them just as in the open; so they are always getting burst by the time we come out and return to the battery to give place to three others for four days. It will be a relief to get the Germans out in the open, though I suppose they have prepared reserve positions for miles back.

Will you please let this go round, but H. had

better see it last of all ; she may get anxious if she knew the game had begun. You would laugh to see us now : no leather visible on boots, or cloth on puttees or breeches till about four inches above the knee, all caked in mud, shoulders too, from scraping past men in the trenches. The infantry generally have a word to say to us about it, such as “ Yo ain arf a putten ’em thro’ it now, choom,” or “ Yo artillery blokes is injiyyin’ yerselves now.” They know us as artillery by cap, badge, etc., but most of us signallers are pretty well known personally in many regiments, and have many good friends humble and otherwise amongst them. What silly details my letters must seem to give you dear home people who are looking for big results, and moves of miles by army corps, and who cannot realize, as we can and do, what it means to gain even a short length of the enemy’s front line trench, what organization, what preparation, what buzzing of thousands of Morsed messages over the ’phone or by lamps or helio (only used in emergencies). We may not get your letters for a week now, though you’ll get ours, I hope, as the transport goes back from the front empty more or less. I washed my hands in my mess tin with a cupful of water, otherwise I could not have written, being plastered with mud. Water is a jewel of rarity ; it is a two-mile walk each way, through

the communication trench, to fetch it, though as the crow flies ten minutes' walk would do the trick; we can only fetch it at certain times. Food also has to be fetched from the same "dump" behind the trenches, though one of our wire patrols was good enough to bring ours to-day—a tin of Maconochie and three-quarter loaf of bread for three signallers here, plus dry rations of tea and sugar for twenty-four hours' food!! No jam to-day—we are on our quarter rations again—but I was lucky enough to be able to go to a village two miles in rear of our guns yesterday, before coming here, and got a precious tin of pears and some chocolate, so we are the envy of the infantry signallers. One of the latter yesterday was hit by a shell full in the back and killed instantly. But the greatest difficulty is dealing with the badly wounded—*e.g.*, this morning a man had his leg torn from thigh to ankle. It is very awkward to carry such cases out, poor beggars; the labour is enormous, almost killing to the stretcher-bearers. I helped to carry a man at Neuve Eglise across the open for a short mile, and shall never forget it; here it is over two miles of torturous trench-slipping and inches of mud at that. Dead silence has "rent the air" for the last ten minutes. As the rain is so thick, no observing can take place, but there is an earth-trembling sort of rumble that shows there is

heavy firing going on somewhere, up or down the line fifteen or twenty miles away. Everybody is wonderfully cheerful and smiling, as is ever the case whenever there is any chance of "strafing the Hun" heavily, and it bucks you up and makes you think we shall finish them off before Christmas! But as we tell one another, the first seven years of a war are the worst, so we expect an easier time after 1921 !!!

"Great Scott!" We had a bang then from a German heavy gun, burst about 100 yards away, dirt and bits falling in all directions, and shook the ground. There's another! I must go now on duty at observing station about 100 yards off, but it is seven minutes' walk, scramble, slither and slush along the fire trench. . . .

The sixth heavy shell has fallen since I wrote "Great Scott!" Could someone kindly send a pair of bootlaces, some shaving soap and some disinfecting soap for washing clothes and self? No. 7 just burst. Here's No. 8! Our poor ears; we shall be as deaf as the old woman of P.O.S.T. fame. (No. 9!) They are firing quickly now from heavy howitzers. (No 10! No. 11!) A battery of heavies, evidently. (No. 12!) Cheer oh! See you for Christmas (No. 13!), I hope. Excuse writing (No. 14); they'll be on now all night with a field gun accompaniment.

Sunday, October 3rd, 1915.

The firing on both sides is good, but on the various fronts I have been on, ours has always been consistently better than theirs, and their observing stations we have spotted have been spread on the ground after about three ranging shots as a rule. I remember one we spotted months ago before Messines; it was a wee red brick cottage where one day we thought we could see with telescope and glasses that a slate or two had been shifted from the roof as by someone who wanted to get as high as possible to observe. We let it alone for about three weeks, watching it closely daily, not wishing to waste shots to no purpose; but one morning the German observer evidently got up a few minutes too late, and just at dawn a man was seen to run into the house followed by two others from a hedge. The first shot we put there was 100 yards over, the second about 50 yards short; the third pushed the house over in a cloud of thick dust. . . .

The Colonel was very pleased with the work of the signallers apparently during the last show; he's been quite a pleasant old beggar over it.

October 8th, 1915.

Well, we have been through the mill lately and had a good deal of heavy "strafig" about

which we mustn't talk as yet. I've got an idea "them Germans" will be thoroughly sick of the British armies before they have finished. We made no advance here, not intending to, on this immediate front that is; but we "engaged the enemy" at all points, and the earth shook so continuously that it was like sitting down with a large cat purring on your lap! Try it and see how tremulous the result is, throw in an earthquake, several close gas explosions and a stiff hail of bits of steel, nickel and iron, together with twenty boys beating a corrugated iron roof and 150 banging large drums, and you'll have a fair idea of the racket entailed by engaging and beating off a lot of angry people made in Germany. The singing has at last gone quite out of one ear and nearly all out of the other, after a week of comparative quiet. At the time I was in the infantry fire trench with the officer directing the fire which hashed their trenches to pulp and tore and melted their barbed wire as if it had been cotton, and certainly at the time we never had much hope of coming through it; but Lieut. T., F. and I had a most merciful and miraculous series of escapes, the climax of which was having our observing post pulped, we only escaping, being but a yard away down in the trench, crouched over the buzzer telephone, and missing all the explosive force but the shower of

earth and stones. We—*i.e.*, our “side”—have, of course, been mercilessly punishing the Germans every night as they strive to mend their wire and adjust their smashed parapets. We let them get the parties out well after dusk, and our infantry listening posts wait until they hear them thoroughly established at work; then up goes a flare and they get “fifteen rounds” rapid from rifles and machine guns laid on them and, if necessary, the guns join in the chorus. They do and have done the same to us, of course; but it is breaking their nerve badly, and frequently they fire hard and fast from their trenches for half an hour at intervals through the night, to which we either give no response or just a dignified round of fire from one battery, four bangs at intervals of five seconds and then no more. Their bullets strike the parapets with a noise greater than the discharge of a rifle, and they are very thorough in their method of fire. So many machine guns are laid before night at about knee level so as to catch anyone crawling, and also to catch our fellows as they hop over their own parapets, so many more level with top of our parapets; and the rifles usually as follows. Suppose the distance in any given place between the German and British fire trench is 300 yards, rifles will be sighted at that, of course, during the day; but at night the sights are raised some to 330, 350,

400, etc., so as to sweep our parapets body and head height and also at ranges to hit and sweep our reserve trenches to ensure a good supply of bullets falling behind these as well, so as to make it uncomfortable for men moving in the open behind the lines and for the gun positions, for the modern German rifle has a range (extreme) of 3,500 yards, and our rifles have one of 3,800 yards.

Have you heard the latest joke. If not you must repeat it with very lugubrious face. Ask someone if they have heard the bad news about the Navy. They'll say "No." Then you tell them "Our Navy has utterly failed, as it has been trying for fifteen months to get into the Kiel Canal and it can't." Then add—"There's no room !"

I wonder when the German Navy will come out of Kiel and do its boasted blockade of England. We hear nothing of the Navy's doings here. I am enclosing a piece of aeroplane wing for A., and if anyone else would like a portion as a memento, would she cut a bit off? It was a German plane brought down by our guns not a hundred miles from somewhere in France.

CHAPTER XIII

LEAVE

October 23rd, 1915.

I HAVE some good news for you and for me too, that is, *if* leave is not stopped before next week, I am one of the next to go, so look out for me some time on Friday, 30th, but don't build too much upon it, as we never know when attacks from one side or the other may not come on and stop all leave. Won't it be gorgeous if I do come !!! I shall want a complete set of "civvy" clothes, as these are not fit to be seen, and I want to get free and out of uniform for a day or two to be a gentleman once again !! I hardly dare think of it, and shall not consider it safely accomplished until I set foot on English soil. . . .

The powers that be were pleased with our work, and a few of our names were sent forward for mention. Bombardier U. and Driver N. we *think* will get D.C.M.'s, having been recommended for them. Bombardier D. received a card of notice of services from the General—which probably means mention in despatches for him—on behalf of himself, three gunners and myself for "excellence of work." I fancy, from

what Captain —— said to me, that this leave is due to that somewhat. But none of us really did anything, only the usual wire-laying and repairing and helping to dig out a man or two* and keep infantry communications going on our wires, things that are just part of the ordinary day's work and nothing more than hundreds are doing daily.

Last night we were expecting a heavy attack from the Germans, as they have been blowing our front line trenches about—and we rebuilding them—for days, and also to crown all they cut lanes in their own barbed wire the night before, ready to charge through. But we have been hitting them sick with shell fire since then, just to damp their ardour, and cheer up the four extra divisions which (from aircraft observations and other sources we have learned) they have brought up against us on this front. I am off duty all day to-day, so have time to finish this, but go on to-night (8 p.m.) at the battery forward observing station, then the trenches for four days; *but* if all's well I shan't do the four days—hope to be home on the fourth !

October, 1915.

I and another man walked two miles through trenches to the rear, where we had an A.S.C.

* The writer omits to mention that this was done in the open under fire; one man was dead, the other unconscious but revived.—ED.

wagon which took us four miles, and where others joined from different battalions, and we marched the rest of ten miles to Louvencourt through rain and mud, where there was a train waiting which took us in cattle trucks some miles to —, where we got refreshment.

En route to the coast during one halt occurred one of those incidents which made one's heart stand still (or fall into one's boots !) An officer appeared with a sheet of paper in his hands and said a certain number of us must have our leave cancelled ! He would read out the names. (Intense suspense, followed by relief or disappointment as intense.) There were eight names read out. Mine was not one. The men took it magnificently. *No word of complaint was uttered.* They just went back.

Then a *rapide* about fifteen miles an hour in more cattle trucks which took us to B. or a little port near by. There we were turned out 2,000 strong and had to form up on the side of the road and wait (standing in fours) for four hours. At last we were allowed to go on board the boat, but in five minutes came the order, " Every man off the boat." (Again we thought our precious leave was stopped !) We were, however, marched to a camp four miles outside B., where we were told we could sleep in boarded huts. It was then about midnight and we were fairly lucky, having

a blanket each served out. We dropped down to sleep ten in a shed, when an officer came round and said "Réveillé" would be at 4.30, but one man in each shed was to volunteer as cook for the rest and get up at 3.30. At 4.30 we were up and given bread and cheese, no tea or any hot drink. We had looked forward to a cup of tea before starting. Then all marched back to the wharf, where we were again kept standing *four hours* before embarking. At last the order came to go on board, where we were packed together like herrings in a barrel, filling every niche, even the steps of the companion ways, etc. We were, of course, only allowed on the lower deck, while the eight officers or so had the upper to themselves. The Prince of Wales came over on that boat, probably the cause of the second delay, some thought, as they might have to wait till he was on board before allowing the men on. The first delay might have been due to a floating mine, making it unsafe to go by night. Once on board we could at last feel sure of our leave, and we landed at F. about midday. Six short days of bliss ! Hooray !

December 8th, 1915.

For the last few days I have been going to try and describe the trenches, into which, thank goodness, we three are not due to go again till

Tuesday, 14th; but each time I have realized the hopelessness of explaining it, approaching, as it does, the incredible.

To start with, most of the dug-outs are long since silted up, some of the deep ones having eight to ten feet of treacly mud in them. Both sides of every trench have just slid in towards one another after two weeks' rain, a week's hard frost, and then three weeks' rain again; re-vetting and sandbagging all bulges and gives way like ordinary earth in this slimy clay, and the trenches are simply drains for the surrounding country. In no place on our sector is the trench bottom feelable until you are over your knees in thin gruelly mud, and in some of the approaches to the fire trench the gruel is six feet deep, with a foot or so below that of binding glue, which means certain death if your feet are caught in it. The fire or front line trench is thigh deep in gruel, being higher ground than the communication trenches that lead to it. Where the most clinging and deepest parts occur, men simply scramble out on to the top when moving from trench to trench. Rations and water can only be got to the infantry in the fire and reserve trenches once in two days, and all that has to be carried over the land at night, "freezing" or dropping flat when the star lights and flares go up. Five times in the last four

days has our infantry wire broken ; most of it is buried under mud in the trench, and the weight of trench props and revetting hurdles—which are such a danger to catch and trip the feet under the mud—has kept on breaking the wires, so yesterday an altogether new line was laid straight to the fire trench along the top or surface of the ground.

The funny point is that in front of —— Wood, where the —— are in the front line trenches, they are moderately clean and dry, being on higher ground, whereas our sector from them to where we touch 4th Division is low lying. Our three signallers at present in the trenches with the infantry are going to try and get out (two of them) to-night to fetch their rations and water.

Yesterday, the right section lieutenant of our battery tried to go in to our trench observing station and got stuck, mud up to his thighs and feet immovable, as the suction of this clay is tremendous. Two men spent an hour digging him free, regardless, he humorously remarks, of his feet, and finally they were able to get their shovels underneath each of his feet, and for about five minutes rocked him to and fro and finally levered him out. Five men were smothered a week ago, four killed outright, and as to the fifth, it is doubtful whether his recovery will be complete ; that was a dug-out giving way on

the top of them. All the sumps are filled and overflowing, although ten to twelve feet deep and always being pumped out; but you can only pump out on to the land, and the water percolates through again. One of the — in front of us here got in mud up to his mouth, but was able to wedge his rifle in the fallen revetting and hold himself up, and it was hours before they could dig him free. Similar cases occur daily all along the line. Out on the top here in the gun position we are half-way up our shins in mud, and it is difficult to keep the dug-outs and gun pits free of water and mud. The gunners, who, of course, never leave the position, cannot imagine the state of the trenches in front, never having to go into them as the signallers do, until they see the regiments coming out by platoons when being relieved, and they wonder how we get so caked. My overcoat, from the back waistband to the hem, is a heavy mud plaster; no cloth is visible, nor is any visible from cuff to shoulder on the outside. We simply can't bother to get dry; it is impossible, in fact, and the only joy is that being so hardened it doesn't hurt us in the least. Since I have been the last twenty-four hours in this dry battery dug-out I have got dry, except just round the knees and ankles, which seem to take longest to dry.

The German trenches must be similar, and,

from their shouted remarks occasionally, they are fed up to the eyes. Yesterday two of them were so much so that they came and stood out on their own parapet unarmed and with folded arms, inviting a shot; but our fellows wouldn't fire at them, guessing how the poor beggars felt. "What shall we do about them?" said one of the privates to an officer of the ——. "Let the poor devils alone," was his reply, and after about ten minutes they dropped down into their own trench again. But I cannot say we have been merciful to them in bulk; we have pounded their trenches and the villages and woods of G., P., and S. day and night for days and mashed up their trenches pretty well as badly as the rain. We smash their barbed wire about every three days; our battery has done a lot of that lately, and the day before yesterday half an hour's fire from one section (two guns) blew a lane ten yards wide clean through their wire defences, which at that point have a depth of thirty to forty yards. This gives them the idea that we are going to attack; so they crowd up their supports, and, of course, give us a hot time; but then we fire again on the heavily manned trenches, and when their working parties come out to repair the wire at night we fire on them. We allow them to start and go on for perhaps an hour, and our sentries and listening posts, in front of our barbed wire,

report to the artillery, and we give them a salvo which disperses the lot ; in half an hour they think it safe again, and as soon as they are out we fire again, and so on all night, keeping them on pins. We give them no rest all along the line, and their daily toll of casualties must be enormous.

In the trenches for four days.

December, 15th, 1915.

My little trio is again in the fire trench for its four days, and a rare old time we have been having in this deep, dark, dank dug-out. After these weeks of rain alternating with hard frosts the state of what is left of the trenches is indescribable. We have all given up using communication trenches to get over the crest a mile away, and all walk in and out of the fire and reserve trenches over the land after dark, falling into shell holes and tripping up over smashed barbed wire and half-filled-in and disused trenches and frequently bodies and impedimenta, and mounds of earth that half conceal bodies, all of which marks the battlefield of H., which the French lost so heavily in taking, about two months before we came here. Starlights keep on going up, and we have to "freeze" until the few seconds of brilliance are over. The "type-

writers" and German trench sentries' shots you have to risk; they are intermittent all through the night, and generally catch a few of the infantry ration parties coming in overland. One beast of a "typewriter" (machine gun) is laid on the parapet of our dug-out, and he "tanks" away all night; I fancy he can see with glasses in the day that a sort of scramble path exists up out of the trench and over the top of the dug-out, and hopes to catch someone using it. Where our dug-out emerges from below on to the trench bottom we have a dam either side. One side is two and a half feet of water and another of mud, now all frozen, but not hard enough to bear; and the other is about a foot deep. But for these dams the water and mud would just flow down the steps and fill up the dug-out. As it is, a constant trickle comes down and we have a huge sump at the bottom, which has to be laboriously baled; I say laboriously, because we cannot stand upright in the dug-out, and when going up the stairs we have to bend double, as the roof follows the stairs at a height of about three and half feet. Now the wretched stairs are beginning to fall in, which means constant digging to keep ourselves from being buried "all alive."

You will have seen from my last letter how the communication and other trenches are;

well, they are worse now and simply don't exist in places for yards. This slippery clay slides on itself and carries the strongest engineering works bodily with it ; revetting, sandbagging, posts and dug-outs all slide in towards one another from both sides of the trench, which, in places, is six to eight feet deep in sticky slime ; in no place from here back to H. (which is a mile across country and two through the communication trenches) is the mud or water less than knee deep. Coming in, as we did on Monday, by day, we had to use them, clambering out over the top for the deep bits, lying flat when spotted and the shots began to sweep over ; but there are so many folds in the ground, shell holes and disused bits of trench, that we were always able to get cover, except when hopping over the parapet and back, or crawling along the ground. To do this with your bed on your back, and with haversack, water-bottle all full, smoke-helmets, revolver, and nose-bag filled with two days' rations, takes such strength and agility as has made me bless my gymnasium days many a time. You slip, slither, and fall and trip over old unseen trip-wires in the grass that anyone who hadn't learned how to fall would break limbs and strain muscles all day long ! Meanwhile the three who were already in the trenches were waiting patiently to be relieved. We were two and three-

quarters of an hour getting in! One of my little squad got stuck once; the mud was well up his thighs and very sticky. F. and I were a yard or two in front, panting hard after our exertions in getting through a bad bit and glad to stand in water for a change to get less resistance. We called him all sorts of names as soon as breath would allow, but all to no purpose. He struggled and wrenched, and we went back and tugged at him and got our arms up to the shoulder in mud in getting a grip of his knees; but he was exhausted, and after great struggles to get ourselves out we got a spade or two, and with the help of two infantrymen in a working party round the next traverse we laboriously dug him out, the job taking three-quarters of an hour; so you can imagine our state on getting here. For two days, luckily, no trench observing had to be done, and we stayed down here just with the telegraph duty and lived in our blankets and shirts, except each night I dodged out overland for the rations. We are nice and dry again now—had been all of us wet to the waist, and have nearly scraped all the mud off.

The infantry in the front and reserve trenches were relieved last night without a casualty, although the in and out going parties came overland, no party more than twenty men at a time, then 200 yards space; so you can tell what a

time it took for the whole battalion to report "all units relieved," and their signallers, replaced by the incoming battalion's signallers, departed last. The fire trench is itself not so bad for mud and water, as it is on a foot or two higher ground, but so many dug-outs are filled in or collapsed that accommodation is very crowded. Luckily we, as artillery, have our own little dug-out, and as no one but signallers is allowed in a signal station—to overhear messages—we have had no extra men put in here. The whole business is so inexpressibly funny, everyone wallowing in mud and no one bothers about it, as it is one of the necessary conditions we are all used to. You hear now and then of men being stuck—all right! dodge along with a spade and help dig him out; he grins and probably says, "Rum blanky war this!" or "I'd like to plant some of them blanky slackers in this 'ere," as I heard a man say yesterday! These infantry go through nightmares of misery and discomfort, and yet they always have a cheerful and humorous way of taking it all. I passed one the other day with one muddy stockinged foot on a piece of board, the other booted foot firmly embedded in a foot of gluey clay, patiently digging out his other boot which had burst the lace and stuck in the mud as he wrenched at it. All he said was, "Bad

weather for June, this, choom, ain't it?" I fairly howled at him, he looked so funny.

Talking of funny sights, we have at last had woolly coats issued, sheer hearthrugs cut into large tunics, and they smell like hearthrugs. Mine is a sort of whitey grey; few of the signalers have got them dark enough to wear on wire-laying or observing jobs, but they are "bon" for telegraph and telephone work or sleeping, etc. Truly, we are the best equipped army.

Someone was asking me if there was going to be a sort of Christmas truce. I am glad to say there is not; strict orders have been issued that there is to be no such waste of kindness towards the enemy that has caused us so many losses and used the foulest of means of securing those losses. Also, if we are spending five million pounds a day on the war and every day makes it harder for the Germans, why waste five millions and slacken the awful "tanking" they are getting? We want to make them fed up, not to give them opportunities of feeding up, and if they send a shell or two over into our infantry trenches on Christmas Day, as they most certainly will (probably two or three hundred will come over, or at the batteries, and observing station and villages we occupy), I believe we are to respond with a searching and unceasing bombardment of their trenches, first line and reserves

of E., P. and S. woods and villages that will break up their Christmas parties.

On reading this through I find there is more of mud than Christmas in this letter! . . .

February 2nd, 1916.

. . . We have been busy lately, having had six gas attacks launched against us in four days on the ten mile front facing us, and have ourselves made two big attacks, besides keeping up a more or less constant bombardment of the enemy lines and fortifications. Don't think, when you hear of them or us attacking, that it necessarily means an advance. Generally it means one or two regiments from our side, after terrific artillery support, rush forward and bomb the Germans out of their front line trench, then retire again to their own or under the fire dig an advanced trench nearer the German one, as their front line trench is rarely worth occupying, being covered by their second, third and fifth line trenches and the range of it known to the yard by their guns. When I tell you that it takes two battalions to do this trick on a short front of, say, half a mile, you can tell how many it is likely to require on the whole front and to continue and carry on their last lines three or four miles in their rear. We—the guns—smash away their wire first and shell their second line

and communication trenches to prevent reserves coming up ; then men with wire cutters and bombs advance under cover of the dark or fog and cut away the remaining bits of wire in the lanes the guns have cut, a telephone line is run out with the attacking infantry, and the operator crouches just behind the German parapet and reports results as ordered ; then the whole party returns, reeling in their telephone wire and bringing in any wounded, and get back again to their own trench, after hurling bombs into all the German dug-outs and bombing their way all the trench till all opposition is gone. Then, of course, our guns shorten range again and catch the German reserves as they pour into their front trench, and also we fire afterwards on all the nightly working parties who mend the wire and rebuild the trenches. When we have got three battalions in reserve behind every battalion in the front trench, then we shall be able to advance right forward. But it takes some hours to smash up their barbed wire, hidden often by folds in the ground, by hedges, farms, and trees, and to batter in sandbag forts and deep dug-outs and destroy whole woods so that the hidden machine guns therein may be swept away. They try the same on us, but on this immediate front they have got no further than the top of their own parapet or perhaps a few

yards through the lanes in their own wire defences.

The gas actions are very trying, as the helmets are so stuffy to move about in ; we had a whiff of it the other day that had come from twenty miles down the line beyond where C. was. The whole of this part from us and twenty miles each way has been in constant fighting day and night for days of the type I have mentioned. We shall have to have more men. Meanwhile, Germans are maturing from childhood to manhood at the rate of two million a year, and they are in fighting men still two to one against us. But if the men at home would only realize this, and realize one more fact also, they would enlist by the million ; the other fact is that man for man we can beat them every time and generally put up with odds against us. I have seen one monoplane of ours attack and drive off four Aviatik biplanes armed with a heavier gun than the monoplane. I have seen a party of 100 of our infantry bomb their way into and back from an enemy trench on a front of about a quarter of a mile, and get back again with only three wounded, and not leave a fit German in the trench they have temporarily taken. Now, to turn to a more cheerful side. The Germans put on a sheet of board on their barbed wire, "Gott mit uns," which our men, of course, read through glasses next day. So that night they crawled up to the

board and turned it round to face the Germans' lines, writing underneath, "Don't swank! We've got *mittens* too!!"

This division has this week, for all this extra fighting, laid 300 miles of duplicate telephone wires, twelve of which has been laid by this brigade of artillery and over four by our battery, all connecting up in duplicate and by devious routes all our different stations. On the night of our biggest fight, January 29th and 30th, we had five duplicate wires to the forward observing station. Four were broken by shells and bullets, two of them in so many places as not to be worth while repairing, gaps of forty to fifty yards being blown away; so you can tell that "we signallers" are busy when a shunt is on. Only four of the original signallers on the original battery staff as organized in England are left now . . . all the others are casualtied, or sick, or returned to England sick, and we have had to train gunners as we went along for some months past.

All the men who are getting commissions are fighting shy of this four year business, as for all they know, under the new Acts they may find themselves embodied as a Regular force for that period. So we stick to our original contract, "For the period of the war," and may it be short and the victory absolutely complete, with no bungling lawyers to stultify the sacrifices

made by the Army, and to render indecisive all its victories, as in old times.

No more now. If things quiet down a bit I shall be able to get some arrears of letters off, but we all hope there will be no quieting down, but an ever-increasing pressure until the great push comes off. To "The Day!!" Hope to see you all in the summer; there is never any harm in hoping! . . .

Belgium, May 1st, 1915

TO ALL BETWEEN THE AGES OF
18 AND 35.

In Flanders, where our forbears strove and
wrought
Such deeds of derring do, and deathless daring,
Assisted—so runs history's report—
By much hard swearing,

There stands to-day our Army, face to face
With Teuton foes (who needs must drag the
Turk in !),
A line of Britons, khaki clad, in place
Of leather jerkin !

They *stand*, though swept by Mannlicher and
Krupp,
Spied on by Zeppelin, Parseval and Taube,
Waiting—with hope—for something to turn up,
Like old Micawber !

Waiting for you to turn up, Slackers ; buoyed
Up with the hope your help won't need *demanding*.
Don't let them think, in England's need, you're
void
Of understanding.

Nine months you've held aloof, secured by others
 From any share in hardship or privation ;
 Nine months you've watched the crushing of our
 brothers—

A little nation.

A murdered peasant's cry you heeded not.
 To be an arm-chair critic made you bigger.
 You drowned a dying woman's gasp—with what ?
 A flapper's snigger !

Vain will excuse be when the tale is told
 Of those who did not fear to tread the valley,
 That they might keep our country safe, and hold
 The road to Calais.

Come and join us, whose voice rings through
 this verse,
 No more boiled shirts, or tangos, or mazurkas !
 Lest names like these cleave to you with our
 curse :

“ *The Craven Shirkers.* ”

"LEAD O' THE GUN"

Sounding alarm, scuffle and skurry,
Out with the guns—out in a hurry !
Two leagues away guns are required
Covering flanks, someone's retired.
Orders rapped out, coolly yet tartly,
Get a move on ! harness up smartly !
Hook in the teams, wait for the shout,
"Advance from the right in column of route."
Bucking and jibbing, rattle and jingle,
Snorting with fright, team-horse and single.
"Centres" and "Wheelers" join in the fun,
But a steady old pair in the "lead o' the gun."
Plodding old, nodding old, lead o' the gun.

Jingle and trot, rumble and grind,
Guns to the front, wagons behind ;
Slip of a boy—little but true,
Trained half a year—fighting for you !
Light as a twig, not twenty-one,
But fitted to drive in the lead o' the gun.

Charge at the dykes, ditches and banks,
Stumble and jolt, close up the ranks !
Bracken and brook—keep on the run—
Gateway and gorse—lead o' the gun !
Dash at them, crash at them, lead o' the gun !

“Halt ! Action front ! Swing round the trail,
 Limber drive on” through leaden hail.
 Back with the teams, back to the rear,
 Driver and horse not wanted here.
 Fearless you wheel back from the Hun,
 You’ve played the man, lead o’ the gun !
 Slim little, trim little, lead o’ the gun.

Soon a shell bursts, two drivers reel,
 Two saddles bare, “Centre” and “Wheel,”
 Still, though the shells shatter and scream,
 “Lead” drives on with his six-horse team ;
 He falls at last, stern duty done,
 Falls with his pair in the lead o’ the gun,
 Lying there, dying there, lead o’ the gun.

Someone must go, fighting the Huns,
 Somebody’s darling drive our field guns,
 Someone must help to fill up the ranks,
 Scant though his pay, and scant the thanks.
 Honour costs naught (save by whom won),
 So honour the lads in the lead o’ the gun,
 Slogging in, jogging in, lead o’ the gun.

WOMEN OF BRITAIN

There are tear-stained faces in Britain
Of mother and wife bereft.
There is many a lonely maiden,
And many an orphan left.
But you women of Britain, think you
The heart of our race grows cold ?
What the blood of the fathers purchased,
The blood of the sons must hold.

Round many a Belgian farmstead
And village in fair Champagne,
In many a lonely orchard
Lie closely the British slain.
But you women of Britain, look you,
They died that our land may live,
And the price that ensured her safety
Was never too much to give.

Gaunt outlines of straggling branches
Show black 'gainst the dull grey sky ;
Like shrouds o'er the mounds of heroes
The cold sobbing rain sweeps by.
But you sorrowing women faint not,
For yours is the better part,
The ministry of a healing hand,
The prayer of a faithful heart.

As the bleak and pitiless winter
Strikes desolate all the land,
So death's angel upon your dearest
Is laying his ruthless hand.
But you heart-broken women, courage !
The dawn of the spring is nigh,
Your proudly-made sacrifice grudge not,
Your country you serve thereby.

There are tear-stained faces in Britain,
Of mother and wife bereft.
There is many a lonely maiden,
And many an orphan left.
But you women of Britain, think you
The tale of our land is told ?
What the blood of the fathers purchased
The blood of the sons *shall* hold.

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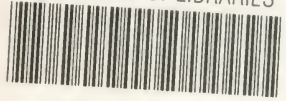
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